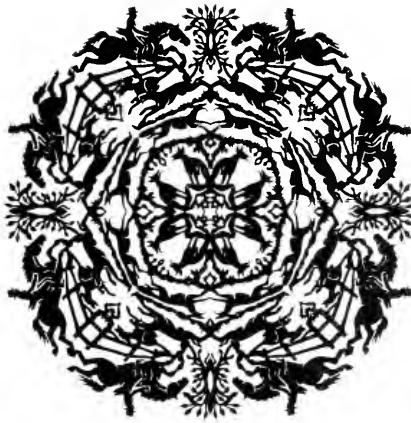


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“ HOUNDS, GENTLEMEN, PLEASE ! ”



Photo]

[D'Arcy, Dublin

THE LATE MR. JOHN WATSON, OF BALLYDARTON.

Founder of the Carlow Hunt.

(Died, aged 82 in 1869.)

“HOUNDS, GENTLEMEN PLEASE!”

BY

COMMANDER W. B. FORBES, R.N.

(“MAINTOP”)

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON MCMX

INTRODUCTION

It is not very often, I think, that a sportsman who is not a Master of Hounds is more deeply interested in the breeding and pedigree lore of the foxhound than my old friend, the writer of these pages.

That being the case, it was, perhaps, very natural that he should endeavour, by his writings, to create a wider interest in the foxhound in the minds of those who follow him—an interest which may induce them to give to that noble animal the fair play, when in chase, that he deserves—and by doing so help to lighten the burden of the M.F.H., who cannot be expected to attend to the hunting education of his field, in addition to his many other duties.

In every sport and in every game the beginner, however keen he may be, is bound to make mistakes. For instance, at polo, in his first season he will probably get a decision for “off-side” given against him, and so penalise his own side. A tyro at fishing will, to start with, no doubt muddle himself up with his own cast, or fix it firmly in the nearest tree. But it is reasonable to expect that after a year or two’s experience, even though the beginner may not have arrived at the top of the tree in the particular branch of sport that he desires to follow, he will, at all

events, have arrived at a certain state of proficiency, and will be able to avoid the most glaring mistakes which he was guilty of at first.

For some reason or other, which I have not so far been able to fathom, this does not seem to apply to foxhunting; and the man who consistently overrode hounds, or talked at the top of his voice when they were at fault in his first season or two, does not seem to cure himself of these habits with maturer experience in the way one might reasonably expect of him.

Therefore, I feel sure that many Masters of Hounds and other foxhunters will welcome this volume, and will join with me in hoping that its contents may be perused by the many otherwise good sportsmen whose ardour for the chase seems at times to blind their consideration for other people's sport.

In these pages also the humorous and social sides of hunting have not been forgotten.

WATERFORD.

CURRAGHMORE.

PREFACE

AT the request of many Masters of Foxhounds—some of them old and dear friends, others kindly acquaintances—these sketches, which appeared originally in *Land and Water* and the *County Gentleman*, have been produced in book form under the able editorship of my friend, Mr. E. D. Cuming. Many of the chapters were suggested to the writer by Masters of Hounds, and his thanks are due in particular to the late Mr. Robert Watson and his son, the famous Master of the Meath; to Miss Somerville, to Lord Waterford, Mr. C. F. M'Neill, Mr. W. Selby Lowndes, Major Wise, Captain W. Standish, Mr. H. L. Langrishe, Mr. R. Burke, Mr. Nigel Baring, Mr. E. A. V. Stanley, Mr. A. Pollok, Mr. Isaac Bell, Lord Southampton, and many others.

W. B. FORBES.

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CHAPTER I

“HOUNDS, GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!”

I SUPPOSE it has been the unfortunate position of most fox-hunters at one time or other to be laid up during the hunting season by some mishap, and those whom this misfortune has overtaken, I am sure, have grateful recollection of the visits of their hunting friends, who came to condole and retail the news of their sport.

On one occasion, when so disabled, I remember being rather struck by the fact that though good gallops were often very vividly described, I seldom heard much about the work of hounds. “Hounds ran past so and so. Hounds checked and could not go any pace after!” was about the utmost I learned about them. Sometimes it did one good to hear that “you might have covered them with a sheet,” or that “you never heard such a cry”; but it was seldom, indeed, that the work of any particular hound was mentioned. Noticing this I sometimes used to ask, “What pack was out?” and the answer was usually the same. “Gad! I didn’t notice, old fellow! Bitches, I think! (or dogs, as the case might be), but anyhow they ran like blazes—no hounds could have done

better; I wish you'd been out, you *would* have enjoyed it!"

It may be, I suppose, that as one grows older and the power of seeing hounds at their work grows less, a keener appreciation of the pleasure that is soon to be lost to us takes possession, and a good bit of hound-work becomes as thoroughly relished and gives fully as much satisfaction as the "feel" of a good horse clearing a big fence used to do in the days that are gone.

There are some, of course, in every hunting-field who have from boyhood been of a "doggy" turn, who have loved to see terriers, pointers, and spaniels at their work, and for whom the wonderful sight of a pack of foxhounds carrying a scent for miles over a stiffly enclosed country has, therefore, a fascination that nothing can equal. In boyish days it was a delight to watch how the terrier would hunt his youthful master's footsteps inch for inch, no matter how he doubled or what obstacles he placed behind him, and the interest in this work has probably been the making of many a sportsman.

Is it possible that because the retriever is the only dog that many of the rising generation have ever seen used with a gun, the fondness for the canine race and their wondrous instincts is becoming one of the many good things that have been? If so, the look-out is a bad one for the huntsman, and the thruster of old in the Leicestershire story, who, after larking home, exclaimed, "What fun we should have if it wasn't for these d——d hounds," will have many sympathisers in the rising generation.

It is true that there are hosts of good fellows who come out “keen as mustard for a hunt,” who ride like sportsmen, who are ready to help the huntsman in every way, and who “take notice,” too (as nurses say of their babies). If a holloa is heard when hounds are at fault, one of these cheery horsemen is ready to inform the huntsman of the fact, willing, too, to ride away and find out if the shout conveys genuine information; in short, to play as sportsmanlike a part as he knows how to do. But in many, if not most, cases, the check has been brought about by the field; or, if not, would have almost immediately been rectified by the hounds themselves, but for the presence of the field; and what the huntsman wants is not help that *he* may hunt the fox, but all to assist in letting *hounds* have a chance of hunting him.

Let any one make a point of noticing the conduct of the field when next a sudden check occurs after a smart burst over a fair line of country. Hounds have brought the line, let us say, well into a field, and then suddenly throw their heads up. Motionless the huntsman stands, watching every movement of his favourites, who, busy as bees, are flitting hither and thither, casting themselves industriously. Instinctively he holds up his hand, but in less than a minute there is a crowd close behind him. That is bad enough, for if a fox in flight (which is, as a rule, a steady, self-contained pace), sees an object he mistrusts in front at some little distance he often runs right back in his tracks before branching off to get round whatever it is that affrights him, without being seen. Hounds eager in pursuit and full of

drive are, we all know, apt to overrun a scent; here on this particular ground, where the strong, fresh, heel-line overlays the still warm line of his flight,* it is no wonder that with even more dash than usual they carry on far beyond where Reynard stopped and turned. If there is a man in the field ploughing in front of him, a shooter, or one taking his walks abroad, the huntsman sees at once what is the matter; but many an object he wots not of, a strange shadow on a fence, a bit of white (probably a cow in the next field) showing through the hedge, may be suspicious to the eye of a hunted fox, and he will turn back for awhile.

Now, if only the motionless huntsman were in the field alone, and if his darlings were of the right sort, round they would come with a systematic swing, and it would require no holloa to tell him which way the fox had gone. When such a check occurs is the moment for the sportsmen who watch and care for hounds to distinguish themselves, to implore their comrades not to go on, but to stand together and be silent. But here they come! The hounds have checked, they see. "What a nuisance!" "What a pity!" "What an awful bore!" "Just as it was getting jolly, too! Always the way!" "But, by Jove! can't they run! And did you see what an awful ender old Juggins came at the mearing fence?" "That ass, Muggins, swore I crossed him!" "Why, you weren't within yards of him!" "Hulloa! what's the matter with the old 'un?"

Here the M.F.H. makes a little brimstony sort

* Technically termed the "counterfoil."

of speech which contains references to “chattering magpies,” &c.

“How cross he is to-day,” pouts Beauty on the Bay, for (print it in a whisper) the ladies are always the worst offenders at a check. “What does he want us to do?”

“Give the hounds room and stop that infernal cackle,” is what old Mr. Misogynist over there is probably saying in his beard. Would it not really be well for some one to explain that ardent, over-excited hounds, carried on too far as it is by their pursuers, cannot settle down to recover a line when folk are wandering about close to them; that laughter and loud talking are apt still further to unsettle them and get their heads up; while the steam from perspiring horses moving about spreads like a fog over the field and does not help the pack in their endeavour to regain the scent?

But, unless a man be fond of hounds and their work, he cannot, I suppose, be expected to interest himself at this particular juncture, and will probably be content with hoping that “Old Blank will set them going again soon, and not make as rotten a cast as he did last time.”

It is certain that on a bad scenting day hounds get very little fair play; but I am inclined to write that on a good scenting day they get none at all, unless they are able to run slick away from their followers. For if scent be really good and hounds run hard no one anticipates a check, we cannot understand why they *should* check with such a scent, and consequently we are all a bit excited, and too

apt to press on to maintain our position when the check does come. There are even evildoers who seize the occasion to edge on, on either flank of hounds, in deadly terror lest they lose their places, and Robinson be defeated in his laudable endeavour to cut down Snooks, who is a stranger.

"Always anticipate a check" is an old and very true axiom of the hunting-field that has been printed before now, and if borne in mind will, perhaps, save the possibility of doing any harm. But it is when hounds check on a road that their difficulties and the huntsman's troubles are at their worst, and when, I am afraid, the field appear most heedless and ignorant; and if the carriage brigade appear at this most critical moment and mingle with the *hard* riders of the roads and those who have followed hounds over the fields, the babble of conversation and the sort of senseless involuntary movement of the crowd often becomes very exasperating to the M.F.H. I recollect once at such a check our Master, all eagerness and anxiety, and looking as if the cares of Europe were on his brow, was holding his divided pack, some in the field to his right, some to his left, and so jogging carefully down the road, when suddenly a hospitable dame in a commodious wagonette came round the corner, charged past the M.F.H., and pulled up as the field, who were following the huntsman at a respectful distance, approached. "Oh, I'm so glad you've stopped!" she exclaimed joyously; "I've lots to eat and drink here—how hungry you must all be." A reply made by the late Mr. Victor Roche on a somewhat similar occasion—

one which only he could have framed—rose to my memory, but not to my lips.

Incidents such as these crop up so often during the hunting season that one is set wondering what many people imagine they have come out to do when they leave their homes for the meet—not that any one objects to their ideas, whatever they may be; for we claim for hunting the superiority over all other pastimes, inasmuch as it affords more amusement to more people, many of whom enjoy themselves equally but for totally different reasons; yet all are supposed to be “hunting the fox.”

Nevertheless, I do think that the pleasures of the chase would be enhanced to many of its followers were they to train themselves to take a little more interest in hounds. Most Masters of Hounds of my acquaintance—and I am proud to say it is a pretty extensive one—are glad to show the pack to visitors, and if the M.F.H. observes a real interest taken he is generally anxious for the visit to be repeated. Now a visit to the kennel and a chat with the huntsman generally leaves food for reflection, and a keen desire to see and notice some hounds that have been admired at their work in the field when next we go a-hunting. It is well also to learn the names of at least some of the champions of the pack, the real “reliables”; for it may chance during a season that you may notice a hound away on a line when nobody else is near, and if you are able to tell the huntsman that “old Chorister showed a line outside the wood,” or that “Tell Tale had it back beyond the road,” the mention of the names of these sages

will cause him to act on your information without a moment's hesitation, and probably you will be thanked and will become the hero of the moment.

But ere you may venture to tender aid to the huntsman, it were well to know what is expected of the follower of hounds in his private capacity.

The story of the young gentleman who proceeded to thrash the hound his horse had kicked was a very good one; and being also true it deserves to be repeated in order to point a moral, and illustrate the pitiful ignorance of the sport displayed by so many who go out hunting nowadays.

The youth's horse "lets out" at an unfortunate, and probably very valuable, hound, and kicks him. "Hit him!" cries a spectator, irate at the proceeding and meaning, of course, that chastisement shall fall upon the horse. "By Jove! I will!" replies the rider of the offending steed, who thereupon sets to work to flagellate the *hound* as hard as he is able. He thought, I suppose, that he was doing a perfectly legitimate and sportsmanlike act. He carried a whip—why shouldn't he use it? Why should the wretched hound come so close to his steed and make him kick? And he would probably have been most indignant if the M.F.H., as in Leech's picture, had sung out, "Mind the hound, sir; he's worth twice as much as your horse!"

"What matter a hound or so? It's a poor concern that won't stand a h'und a day," quoth James Pigg, with withering sarcasm. "Differs from Pigg there, though," notes Mr. Jorrocks in his Journal. But really hounds sometimes receive such unworthy

treatment and such scanty notice from the field that one is almost disposed to believe that many people who hunt hold them in as small estimation as did the victim of Mr. Pigg's satirical explosion.

Still, it is through ignorance they err—sheer unadulterated ignorance; they have never been taught, they know no better. How should they? Many youths, who by the time they come to man's estate have learned how to ride and sit a horse over a fence, who have perhaps played a game of polo or joined a regiment, come out to hunt, and before their first season is over they imagine they know all about fox-hunting, and are satisfied they have become fox-hunters and sportsmen. I wonder how many of them know anything about the value of a hound? I do not mean his intrinsic monetary value, but the value of a good working hound in the hunting season to the master of the pack. Indeed, how few that come out hunting ever think how much care, thought, and expense has been bestowed upon every single one of those forty or so of well-bred foxhounds that we see jogging on to covert round their huntsman's horse? The care and thought began before they appeared as puppies into the world in which they receive such small consideration from many of those for whom they are to provide such glorious pastime. The pedigrees of their parents have been carefully studied before they were mated, their working powers and peculiarities considered, as well as the structure of their frames. It has been, perhaps, no easy matter to procure some of the sires from whose goodly loins they have sprung, nor has it been an inexpensive

matter either. How many selected bitches have proved barren? How many whelps have succumbed before they even reached puppyhood? How many of us who hunt ever tried to get a litter through an attack of yellows, or other ailments of whelphood? Not to speak of the unceasing attention and nursing that distemper itself surely brings—that fell disease which invariably carries off the best.

Then how many of the "bruisers" who ride so jealously close to hounds have any idea of the difficulties about quarters; the walks for the puppies, which we who live in the country well know are yearly becoming harder to obtain in times when the very members of the hunt seem to fight shy of walking a puppy, though they do not suggest how else the strength of the pack is to be maintained, nor, I notice, do they volunteer subscriptions to procure valuable drafts? Who knows what bitter disappointments are in store for the M.F.H. when these puppies do come in from quarters? Can this crooked, flat-sided object, with no more bone than an Italian greyhound, be the progeny of his matchless "Nameless," by the great Lord Blankshire's "Nonsuch," whom she visited after as much negotiation and interest as would be required to get a boy into one of His Majesty's own regiments of Guards?

Then there is the drafting for shapes of this or that youngster, and the further drafting when cubbing has begun and irreclaimable vice appears. How little the keenest of us ever think of all the troubles of that training period with the pack, and all they have to go through. The rounding, the

teaching (often most troublesome) to carry couples, to learn their names; their education to free them from all riot, the accidents that generally befall some before November arrives, the work to get some of them home after getting away with a fox in a wild and distant country, when, indeed, some never return at all.

The above details only give a slight notion of the trouble and expense that has been bestowed upon *every hound* before he begins regular hunting at all. People seem to think that a hound at best is only worth a few sovereigns, so can be replaced at will. Can there be a greater mistake?

In the hunting season if a *good working hound* comes to grief he cannot be replaced at all. What huntsman, worth his salt, was ever known to part with one of his real, reliable fox-catchers in the middle of the season? Few even of hunting men realise the enormous amount of trouble hounds give to their huntsmen before he gets them really handy; they require training as much as pointers or retrievers, and we should be very much annoyed if any one set our best young retriever to course as lightly-wounded hare that had been “tailored” by shooting too far behind. Yet thoughtless people keep holloaing on a huntsman and his hounds to foxes whenever they see them, whether they are sure it is the hunted fox or not; getting their heads up and making them wild; indeed, utterly spoiling them unless the huntsman takes precaution and handles them quietly. It takes a very long time to make a bad pack a good one, but a very short time will make the keenest and best

hounds slack or wild. Deceive them, ill-treat them, or abuse them, and the effect will be noticeable in a week; the bitches will be cowed, and the old dog hounds will sulk; just put their toes on the ground and stand looking at their huntsman with a superior air of astonishment and disgust. Horsemen should know and consider that *their sport will improve to a moral certainty in the same ratio that they refrain from kicking and overriding hounds*, which will assuredly cove them more or less, or cause them to sulk; for the condition and frame of mind that hounds are in contribute about 70 per cent. to the sport they show.

The field would also do well to remember that a Master or huntsman loves his hound individually as much, or more than, any one who is out loves his pet dog; and that it is pain and grief to him to see any of them injured or deceived; and it is rather dreadful to reflect that *almost all injury to hounds by kicking, jumping on them, or overriding them, could be avoided*, if people would only learn to be more careful. "'Ware horse" is a cry that should seldom be uttered except by the members of the hunt establishment—"Ware hound" is much oftener necessary.

Two years' experience in the hunting-field appear to qualify any one to be a critic of the huntsman's art—for what is easier than to criticise? We all can have a go at that! Even George Cheek, the school-boy in *Soapey Sponge*, was ready to declare that Mr. Watchorn was "a shocking huntsman—never saw such a huntsman in all my life," although George's experience "lay between his uncle Jellyboy, who had

harriers and rode 18½ stone, Tom Scramble, the pedestrian huntsman of the Slowfoot Hounds, and Mr. Watchorn.”

Such critics are sometimes apt to accuse the huntsman of bloodthirstiness, but huntsmen bring their hounds out to hunt a fox, and not to play with him; if he lead the field over a good country, so much the better for the field, but the hounds come out to hunt him, and, if possible, to account for him.

One often hears by the covert-side, “Why doesn’t he put his hounds in *there* and drive him over *there!*” But all should know (it has been said and written often enough) that, unless favoured by high wind or some exceptional circumstance, you cannot drive a fox over a desired line of country. A fox leaves a covert, nine times out of ten, with a view of going elsewhere to gain safety, and usually chooses a sheltered route, avoiding, if possible, the wild open country, where all his movements can be viewed, and which the thrusters are longing to cross. An able and very observant huntsman remarks that a fox is sometimes driven off his point, out of his selected country, if he starts with a strong breeze behind him on a really good scenting day and with hounds away close to him. Then the wind carries their fierce cry so strongly that they may seem closer to him than they really are. He dare not turn to make his point, for that, he knows, would bring him “into the wind,” giving his pursuers even a greater advantage, and when a run starts in this fashion it is generally “all U.P.” with Reynard.

With regard to the expense of maintaining these hounds, that some treat so carelessly, it is only when financial matters are being discussed at a hunt meeting that the ordinary follower of the chase gathers any ideas on the subject, unless he chooses to interest himself in the matter of kennel management. How many know anything about the way hounds are fed during summer and winter, or how much they eat (I verily believe that some think they are turned out to grass in summer), that oatmeal costs £13 or £14 per ton, and that feeding in summer costs fully as much as in winter if hounds are to be kept really healthy?

These details are not thought of by the majority; if they were we should, perhaps, seldom have that piteous howling of the maimed hound struck by the horse of a careless rider, and "Ware hound!" would probably be passed along more frequently.

Readers who are hunting folk and reside in the country, do you rear a puppy (or puppies) for the Hunt you patronise most? If not, you ought to do so! You will not fail if you do to appreciate the working of hounds, to be zealous for their success, to try on all occasions to ensure their being given a fair chance to exhibit their prowess. I should like to put in a special plea for hounds when they are leaving covert.

"A fall's a hawful thing," as Mr. Jorrocks said, in one of his "sportin' lecturers," but at no time does it seem such a calamity to the ardent sportsman as when it occurs at the very commencement of the chase. At that thrilling period it appears to most of

us that a moment's delay may be fatal, that a yard lost may never be regained, or, if retrieved, the steed may be unduly pressed in the effort. Every dire casualty that is likely to imperil the pleasure presents itself to our excited fancy, with the result that at the beginning we are all inclined to ride a little harder than we ought to do. Yet if we pause to consider, it will be manifest to all who care about hunting that the first few moments after hounds come away from covert are just the most critical of the pursuit, and if huntsman and hounds are given a chance now all will probably go well if there is a scent. If, on the other hand, they are interfered with and scent is poor the fox obtains every advantage, consequently he is able to put such a long distance between his brush and the nose of the leading hound that without a change of scent in their favour hounds are very unlikely indeed to come up to him.

Now, it very often happens that scent lies very badly in the immediate neighbourhood of a fox covert on a hunting morning, and it seems to me that this fact is not sufficiently recognised by hunting folk; but a few instances of what I mean will possibly enable some of my readers to recall occasions when a puzzling want of scent just as hounds came out of covert was followed by a sudden and strange improvement. How often do we hear at the end of a fast gallop, “I thought there wasn't an atom of scent when we first went away,” or words to that effect. Yet if we had been anchored overhead in a captive balloon just above the fox-covert for some minutes previous to its being drawn a good deal of

the mystery of scent would have been revealed. In the first place, there are a few foot-people about—good fellows, no doubt; friends of the covert-keeper maybe, all anxious to see a hunt; and who have a better right? They will not come up to their vantage place near the cover fence till the horsemen appear, and they will not make a noise; but they approach from different directions, and in parties squat down under the shelter of neighbouring fences, out come the pipes and a tobacco-parliament is held. Then "the Hunt" is seen approaching; it advances, say, from the east. There is an ungated field on the right, so the M.F.H. has to send the field right round the covert to take post on the north side, where he wishes them to stand. The gates they have to pass through are in the middle of the fields, therefore they cannot keep close to the covert fences, and so by the time they have taken up their allotted position the crowd of horsemen has thoroughly foiled the ground for many yards from the covert on three sides of it. From the fourth side the fox goes away, but is headed back soon after, not, however, before the whole field has been all over the enclosure on that side also in the struggle for a start.

There are days, of course, when there is no doubt about the thing at all; when hounds come tumbling like a cataract over the covert fence, and with a swoop pounce upon the scent, throw up their heads, and stretch themselves out to race with one veritable scream of fierce ecstasy that causes men to "boil up," no matter how phlegmatic may be their temperament, while those of an excitable disposition straightway

begin to “see red.” There is no need for dalliance on these occasions. Pick your place in the first fence, sit down in your saddle, keep his head straight, and away with you! But such flying starts, such burning scents from covert, are exceptions and not the rule.

“Never be close to hounds for the first two fields, and we’ll maybe show you a run,” was a speech of one of the best of amateur huntsmen, Mr. Henry Briscoe, Master of the Curraghmore Hounds, who knew as much about fox-hunting as most men. What huntsman is there who would not like to feel himself entirely alone with his hounds for the first few minutes—with the knowledge that his active and capable first whipper-in was lying handy with eyes skinned and ears alert, and that every horse behind him but the whip’s had a pair of hobbles on his forelegs?

Hunting pictures, hunting songs, and most of the imaginary runs in sporting novels are all to blame for establishing the notion in the mind of aspiring youth that a fox-hunt invariably begins, or ought to begin, by hounds coming tearing out on the line of their fox and immediately beginning to race him, while the field at once sweep on like an avalanche in their tracks. “Nimrod” was the first offender with the pen, Alken with the brush; and as time went on our old hunting songs of the “southerly wind and cloudy sky” type were succeeded by others which had caught the taint of pace and hurry. Even such true poets and sportsmen as Charles Kingsley and Whyte-Melville pipe to the same tune of pace and hurry, and seizing the most stirring and romantic side of the picture, urge

us by burning words to further deeds of "derring do."
Sings Kingsley in immortal verse:—

"They're running; they're running, go hark!
One fence, and we're out of the park.
Sit down in your saddles and race at the brook,
Then smash at the bullfinch—no time for a look.
Leave cravens and shirkers to dangle behind;
He's away for the moors in the teeth of the wind,
And they're running, they're running, go hark!"

In his prose descriptions of hunting, some of which are as near poetry as prose can be, Kingsley never lets himself go in this fashion, but describes the sport from a sportsman's view. So with Whyte-Melville, who in *Tilbury Nogo*, *Market Harborough*, and many other works, gives us the truest bits of genuine hunting picturesquely described that have ever been written; but when he launches into verse, it is the excitement of the opening moments of a quick thing that his glowing muse has seized upon to celebrate in couplets that ring again "where'er the English tongue is spoken." Here is a verse:—

"We threw off at the castle, we found in the holt,
Like wildfire the beauties went streaming away;
From the rest of the field he came out like a bolt,
And he tackled to work like a schoolboy at play."

And here is the "find" in "The Galloping Squire":—

"One wave of his arm, to the covert they throng.
'Yoi! wind him! and rouse him! By Jove he's away!'
Through a gap in the oaks see them speeding along,
O'er the open like pigeons: 'They mean it to-day!'
You may jump till you're sick, you may spur till you tire!
For it's 'Catch 'em who can!' says the Galloping Squire."

Now, while yielding to no one in admiration for the songs quoted from above, for I know every word of them—“have them off by heart,” as the children say—it strikes me that we have been educated by pen and pencil to think of the commencement of a run always as a scrimmage, where pace and jumping powers are the great essentials, whereas in my humble opinion Mr. Briscoe's words, “Never be close to hounds for the first two fields,” should be set as a copy for most of us.

Perhaps it may be thought that the foiling of the surroundings of a fox covert as described above is overdrawn and exaggerated, but instances in proof of what has been written so often recur to my memory that I may perhaps be excused for relating one or two. In the eastern portion of County Kilkenny there is a famous fox covert named Bishop's Lough, planted in the great days of Sir John Power by the baronet himself on his own property. It has often happened that, owing to the exigencies of the draw, the late M.F.H. (Mr. Langrishe) elected to approach the covert from the Bennett's Bridge Road. Between the road and cover lies a mile of sound old grass, divided into large fields, but ungated. Consequently the field had this little “school” across the country before reaching the covert, and the fences being easy, be sure they spread themselves well over the fields and took these obstacles almost in line abreast. On arrival at Bishop's Lough the horsemen were swung round the right-hand corner of the gorse and held in position there. Some seasons ago the Bishop's Lough foxes used invariably to go away straight for the road and over the bit of

country crossed by the horsemen, and almost always scent appeared queer and catchy, while invariably one heard cries going about such as "Hold hard!" "Give 'em room!" "There's not an atom of scent," &c. Mr. Langrishe, however, always seemed quite alive to the state of the case, and without actually lifting and unsettling hounds seemed to get them along fast by cheery encouragement, till either the road was crossed or the fox had turned clear of the strip of ground we had used on our way to covert, when the game would begin in earnest.

There was a good gorse covert about three hundred yards from my house some years ago, which seldom was drawn blank. It was situated among large, flat fields, which were very difficult to keep clear of folk on a hunting morning, and it was often remarked to me when a fox went away to the north towards the avenues, that there never was any scent at G—. When we ran a fox into the place, however, I never noticed any slackening of the pace or alteration of scent; but people seemed slow to believe that by dallying on horseback in the neighbourhood of the fox covert, they not only stood a chance of giving its inmates a hint to leave, but also were foiling the ground for the hounds.

Instances could easily be multiplied, but enough has been said to make out a plea for hounds at the start. If there is a scent you will know it soon enough, and there may be a scent three hundred yards from the covert, though there be none close round it.

CHAPTER II

ON GOING TO COVERT: MERITS AND DEMERITS OF THE MOTOR-CAR

“ Oh, to feel the wild pulsation that I felt in days of yore,
When my horse went on before me, and my hack was at the door ! ”

HAD Mr. Bromley-Davenport written in the twentieth instead of the nineteenth century, he must, I suppose, have substituted the word “ car ” for “ hack ” ; for where, alas ! is the covert-hack whose paces and performances were the delight of an earlier generation of fox-hunters ? Not many years ago every large hunting stable held, as a matter of course, its complement of covert-hacks—animals that were at no time easy to obtain ; looks, manners, and the best of action in all paces being sought ; while his value was enhanced if the hack possessed the knack of jumping any ordinary fence in good style, for there never has been a time when youthful sportsmen could resist the temptation of a short-cut across country.

The pleasures of the ride to covert on such an animal have been told in eloquent prose by many a writer, and when Whyte-Melville descanted on the

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theme, more than a suspicion of poetry leavened his delightful prose:—

“What freshness in the smell of the saturated pastures! What beauty in the softened tints and shadows of the landscape—leafless though it be! How those bare hedges seem ready to burst forth in the bloom of spring, and the distant woods on the horizon melt into the sky as softly as in the hot haze of a July noon! The thud of our horse’s hoofs strikes pleasantly on the ear, as we canter over the undulating pastures, swinging back the hand-gates with a dexterity only to be acquired by constant practice, and on which we plume ourselves not a little. He is the sweetest hack in England, and shakes his head and rolls his shoulders gaily as we restrain the canter from becoming a gallop. Were he *not* the *sweetest*, etc., he would begin to plunge from sheer exuberance of spirits; we could almost find it in our heart to indulge him. The scared sheep scour off for a few paces, shaking their woolly coat, and then turn round to gaze at us as we fleet from field to field. . . . A scarlet coat glances along the lane in front, and, as this is our last bit of grass, and, moreover, the furrows lie the right way, we catch hold of The Sweetest’s head, and treat ourselves to a gallop. Soon we emerge on the high road, and relapse into a ten-mile-an-hour trot. The Sweetest, who thinks nothing of twelve, going well on his haunches, and quite within himself.”

That was how they went to covert in the Shires early in the sixties, when Whyte-Melville wrote *Market Harborough*, and Lord Stamford mastered the Quorn; at least, that was the pleasantest way to journey on to a meet in those delectable regions where bridle-roads still prevail, where grass “ridings” abound, and gates, properly hung, fly open to the crafty application of the hunting-whip.

We do not all hunt in the grass countries, but, no matter in what happy hunting grounds we encamp, let us have tolerably fine weather, and my vote would always be for the saddle *versus* “trap” or space-

devouring, time-saving motor. Bridle-roads and grassy ride are doubtless delightful, but interest, beauty, and amusement are to be found from the turnpike road, as was well set forth in the middle of the last century, by an author whose words will well bear quotation:—

“The morning ride, slowly pacing, full of expectation, your horse as pleased as yourself. Sharp and clear in the grey atmosphere the leafless trees and white farmhouses stand out, backed by a curtain of mist hanging on the hills in the horizon. With eager eyes you take all in; nothing escapes you; you have cast off care for the day. How pleasant and cheerful everything and every one looks! . . . To your mind the well-cultivated land looks beautiful. In the monotony of ten acres of turnips you see a hundred pictures of English farming life.”

Last winter it was often my lot to travel on to covert by motor-car, and no one can deny the comforts of the proceeding. There were few meets that could not be reached by the wonder-working vehicle in half an hour. Therefore there was no hurry about breakfast, toilet, correspondence, or the digestion of the morning papers, and I could see no objection to the arrangement. We met with no accident, ran over no pig nor dog, crawling child nor any other creeping thing; we startled no animals badly, and, I trust, scandalised none of his Majesty's lieges. But, when all is said and done, I prefer the hack.

I have been hunting for over forty years, but have never yet been able to master the contents of the daily journal on a hunting morning, to write a satisfactory letter, or to transact a bit of business properly—“When my horse went on before me.”

I envy most profoundly those individuals who are not so constituted, but are able to carry on the flow of daily life unruffled by absorbing anticipations. Upon a hunting morning my natural placidity departs from me, and I long to be away. The idea of being late horrifies me beyond measure, and the very thought of a breakdown with the motor used to sicken me.

Again, by that rapid means of transit I found that I entirely lost the pleasures so charmingly described by the authors from whom I have quoted. What pleasure can one take in the survey of a landscape which flashes past at the rate of thirty miles per hour? Did I wish to point out to my companion where hounds put their fox to ground in the next field, or the spot which the little bay horse carried me over so gallantly in the last run—who-o-osh! the place was behind us before I could raise a finger! Buzzing down one hill and humming up the opposite rise, we come, perchance, on the hounds and hunt servants jogging happily along in front of us, the velvet hunting caps bobbing up above the hedges, and sundry gleams of scarlet revealing their presence before we make the turn, and calling up recollections of the many pleasant jogs I used so thoroughly to enjoy when I overtook hounds while “riding on.”

Those were the times when the miles appeared nearly as short as the motor makes them; when this and that hound was pointed out, his merits related with many an anecdote of his prowess, and reminiscences of his sire and dam came freely from the lips of the civil functionary in scarlet. Then, there was always a good deal to be said of what happened at

some certain time in the last run, for no two runs are ever really alike to a huntsman, and always something happens that is essentially worthy of remark—such “infinite variety” have the pleasures of the chase! Now, with all its advantages, a motor-car going at speed is not adapted for conversation, and I have often wished, when sitting with an interesting companion in the tonneau, that we had adopted a less expeditious method of travelling. It must not be supposed that I wish to pose as an obstructionist. The motor-car is here to stay—till we take to air-ships instead; and as to horses getting frightened by these machines, well, they must just get used to them. That is putting it brutally straight, perhaps, but it is better to say it plainly. In time, in a very short time, horses will care no more about passing a motor-car than they do about passing a mail phaeton, and already they see more of the former vehicle than of the latter.

The season before last I saw at a meet which was held in front of the residence of a M.F.H. five motor-cars grouped among the hounds and hunt servants, and some of the horses were actually touching the motors, all of which had full steam up. A photograph was taken of the scene, and appeared in one of the automobile journals. The group was arranged to show how horses can be got to accommodate themselves to these monsters which have now taken possession of our roads. So many well-known Masters and ex-Masters of Hounds are ardent motorists nowadays that it would seem quite idle to talk of the harm that can be done to hunting by motor-cars.

In Ireland, the Master of the Carlow Hounds, the Master and one of the ex-Masters of the Kilkenny Hounds are among the pioneers of motoring in the island. Earl Fitzwilliam (M.F.H. on both sides of the Channel) is an ardent motorist. The Master of the Wexford Hounds could hardly command the great distances he has to travel without his motor; and Mr. Burke, of Tipperary, had for the last seasons of his mastership taken to the motor-car, which he found invaluable for distant meets. It may be safely asserted that if there were any tangible objections to the motor *as a covert hack* from a hunting point of view, it would not be patronised by the sportsmen I have mentioned. As to the harm done to hunting by the motorists during the chase, it is not within my province now to touch upon that subject; but from all accounts it is a matter that wants looking after, in some parts of England at least.

Having mentioned the hack and the motor as means of locomotion to the covert-side, it only remains to touch upon the trap, a generic name, it would appear, for all descriptions of vehicles that carry passengers, with the exception of omnibuses, mail coaches, and—hearses. Being tolerably free from prejudice, I must nevertheless pray to be delivered from driving to covert on an outside Irish car; and yet I know that many such journeys are before me, so had better, perhaps, change my prayer to one for fine weather (and warm) on such occasion as I set forth upon a car. On these vehicles I defy you to keep warm if it is cold, to keep dry if it is wet; you lose much of the pleasures of the scenery by having to twist your head and body



Photo)

[D'Arcy, Dublin.

Mr. W. E. GROGAN.
Master of the Carlow Hounds.

to see the country you approach, and after a really long drive one feels as if there were a round turn and half hitch in one's vitals, which there is a difficulty in undoing. Let me drive (if drive I must to a meet) with my face to the horses if I am to enjoy any of the pleasures which come so freely to the man who "rides on." Let the animal or animals in front be cheery goers, with a bit of action of the right sort, and if the pace comes up to nine and a half miles an hour, then there are worse places than the front seat of mail phaeton or dogcart.

I have so many pleasant recollections, in all these years, of long drives to the meet, so many delightful remembrances of rides to covert, that I begin to think Whyte-Melville was not far wrong when he told the writer that "one of the greatest pleasures of the day's hunting" was "getting to the meet."

I have always prided myself, during a pretty long hunting career, in being in good time, arguing that, as I liked to see a fox found, I could at least make pretty certain of doing *that*, though very probably I might be unable to see him killed. This habit of making a punctual start served me well when hunting in after years with the glorious old M.F.H. with whom I chiefly hunted for eighteen seasons. His punctuality was proverbial: the country folk by the roadside used to declare that you might "set your clocks by the old Master." He moved off at "eleven sharp," except when on the borderlands of his country, when at certain fixtures he would allow "five minutes' law for strangers," or a few minutes more if a train was late. On these latter occasions,

however, his pent-up eagerness and energy were manifest by the pace he pelted along to reach the first covert, so that it never was safe to take things easy on the way to the meet. In spite of all good intentions, nevertheless, unforeseen accidents or contingencies would occur at times, which caused many feverish moments of misery that will not be banished from recollection even after many years. I have two acquaintances whom I have seldom known to be in time for a meet, yet an uncanny sort of luck seems to befriend their procrastinating proceedings, and just as we go away with the first fox of the day they turn up smiling. It is otherwise with some (myself, I believe, among the number), for seldom does fortune forgive them, and it is not often their lot to find the chase sweeping under their very noses as they hurry from the fixture to the first draw.

There are times of a hunting morning when everything seems to go wrong from the moment we emerge from the matutinal tub to the sickening period when we find ourselves a mile from the meet with the hands of the watch at eleven and the hack with a stone tightly wedged in between the frog and the inner quarter of one of his fore shoes. Everything goes wrong from the beginning! When buttoning the very last button at the knees of our breeches the buttonhook came through the buttonhole with ominous ease and the wretched little disc of mother-o'-pearl dropped gently to the floor. The other pair, which always hang ready on the back of the chair for such emergencies, are then assumed so hurriedly

that there is a feeling of discomfort about them, and if one of the loops by which you pull on your top boots parts company it is difficult to breathe a prayer. Then that infernal tie won't allow itself to come into the proper fold; the breakfast bell rings, and when you reach the table you find there is mighty little time at your disposal; in fact, you have hardly set to work before a grinding of the gravel outside the window tells that "the hack is at the door."

But the pulsation you feel is very "wild," and the world is not going very well with you, for here is a man to "spake with your honour," and perchance a dear old lady with a pleasing tale of Reynard the fox and the fate of certain "hins," and it may be geese. If you are a "District Manager"—and that doubtful honour is mine—be sure this is the moment you will be assailed, and it behoves you, in spite of your feelings, to behave with tact and courtesy. You dispose of the lady and prepare to treat the masculine visitor in distinctly different fashion; perchance it is a tale of woe; perhaps only a neighbour with a sample of oats or hay—but, "Why always on a hunting morning?" you ask yourself; and before the matter is settled you have given the Recording Angel some little work to begin the day with.

Then spurs and overcoat are caught up and adjusted, gloves and hat pulled on, whip stuck in the trap, smoke set going, and at last you are under way quite fifteen minutes behind time, with ten miles in front of you and the road—as roads in this country always are at this time of year—a sheet of stones. Twice in the first five miles the poor hack

picks one up, and you get down and set to work with the crook of your hunting-crop; that fails to do the trick alone, and a stone must be selected to use as a hammer. It is out at last; your gloves are filthy, but you must have a look at the watch, and are appalled at the lateness of the hour. Round the next corner you encounter a steam traction-engine, and the mare never did like a traction-engine, so more delay is caused while she is led past the puffing abomination; the Recording Angel has a busy time now.

There are sharp-cut wheel-marks on the road and tracks of horses on the verges, but no one comes up behind you. Where the mud is thickest, too, you can see the footprints of the hounds, but no velvet caps are bobbing above the hedgerows where the road turns, and when we come into a long bit of straight there are no splashes of scarlet in front of you. Late, awfully late! you think, and take the whip from the bucket, as the road is a bit smoother, and endeavour to make up for lost time; while the reflection that the mare played the fool at the traction-engine makes the application of the thong rather a bitter one. "Hang her!" you say to yourself, "but for that we might be there now!" There are stones again, though, on the slight descent you now make, and you had best go slow, but when she rises the hill you become aware that she is going dead lame. Another stone! I thought so! and the pleasant performance described above is repeated. Now, ahead of the trap is a long line of hay carts very heavy laden, and the road is not very wide, and it seems to

you that, market-day though it be, you never saw so much traffic on this part of the King's highway before. At last you meet a friend, the local postman, and hail him: "Hounds far in front?" "On a long way," he replies, "and a power of traps." Cheering news this, and what a road to make up time on—confound the stones!

At last the fixture is in sight, and from a long distance you can discern four horses, but no others. The whip is applied now pretty vigorously, regardless of the stony road, and it is something, you think, as you hail your groom, to be able to talk again to a human being whose speech you know. To your anxious inquiries as to the first draw he gives satisfactory replies, having had the good sense, not to say hardihood, to inquire of the M.F.H. himself. Furzingfield Gorse! There is a good grass siding to the road, and don't you make use of it! Has the sun come out? Anyhow, the world seems brighter now as you canter along, the horse snorting and shaking his head as he tries to make a canter a gallop, and at the next turn you see away in front of you a parti-coloured mass that blocks the road, scarlet, black, and white, and nearer to you a long line of vehicles, which are speedily overtaken. Your troubles are over for the time.

Perhaps others would not have felt the miseries of this drive in the manner that they came home to myself, who may be over-sensitive to affliction where fox-hunting is concerned, but the idea of being late for a meet has always been a real misery to me. In the days of my youthhood, when winter holidays and

winter leave were spent with an uncle who was a great supporter of the chase, and gave me one of my first hunters, I used often to be on tenterhooks at his dilatory proceedings in the morning ; but he had a pair of right good roadsters in the Perth dogcart that did the ten miles into the country town easily in the hour. So my anxiety ended when I got up beside him ; only to begin again, however, if the meet was beyond the town, for he invariably insisted on doing a bit of shopping on his way through it ; and I'm afraid when the kind old man was inside one of his favourite shops I almost hated him, and felt inclined to loose the reins I held and drive off without him. Since those old days I have never been able to master that fear of being behind time at the fixture.

CHAPTER III

A PLEA FOR INTEREST IN HOUNDS

"IF," writes a friend who is a Master of Hounds, "we could only get the people who come out really to care about hounds and their work, half our troubles would be at an end. There would be no over-riding, no heading of foxes through jealousy to get a start, no following about of a huntsman when he is making his cast. People would stand still *the moment* they see hounds are at fault, and would keep silent. No hounds would be kicked or trampled on, and with the disappearance of jealous riding would come a great reduction of the damage that is done in hot haste to grass-seeds and wheat, and by leaving gates open."

Another correspondent, writing on the same subject, agrees very thoroughly with some remarks of mine (still more strongly put by Mr. Otho Paget) on the necessity of a course of Beckford for the beginner, and would supplement that by a careful reading of Mr. Thomas Smith's *Life of a Fox*. "A course of beagling" is recommended by another before the aspiring fox-hunter is allowed to take the field. He writes: "With foot-beagles all who go out seem to

understand the game; even the beginners set to work to learn all about it; and very seldom do we see the field do anything to interfere in any way with the working of the hounds. An ill-advised holloa may sometimes be heard from an over-excited individual, but, being sternly rebuked, he restrains his ardour and his lungs the next time. No one ever cackles when beagles come to a fault, because every one wants to help the hounds, and knows that the best way to help them is to keep still and silent. Why should not fox-hunters display the same interest in the hounds they follow?" It is many years since I followed a pack of beagles on foot, and am of opinion that I am unlikely to do so again; therefore I must leave it to my readers to decide whether the above most desirable picture of the conduct of the field when "beagling" is accurate or not.

If correct, it is certainly a thousand pities that it is not within the range of practical politics to compel all fox-hunters to begin their hunting career by a course of foot-beagling. And yet I do not know—for, as my friend who advocates the study of Beckford remarks, "there are vast numbers whose observation is not sufficient to guide them," and I am afraid I know at least a couple of malefactors—as a certain M.F.H. would call them—who, I believe, go out constantly with beagles, yet whose tongues are never silent at a check with foxhounds. And, apropos of the "cackling" at a check, I am absolutely convinced that much of the chatter that goes on is caused by a desire on the part of the chatters to let all the world know that they are "up

at the check"—a sort of jealousy or vanity that prevents them from keeping silent, though they know full well they are doing wrong.

The ladies are said to be the most jealous, and, as a M.F.H. once rudely wrote on this subject, "It is the *hen-cackle* that I complain of most."

"Couldn't you write for us," asked another correspondent, "something on the wonderful intelligence and sagacity and the immense value of hounds that would interest people, [and make them think a bit more about the pack when they go out hunting?]" Alas! my dear sir, they have Beckford, "The Druid," "Hambleton" Smith, and "Scrutator" to read, and what can be said by the present writer, what tales can he tell that have not been already better told by those great celebrities? And I fear few people read nowadays of the marvellous deeds of foxhounds. All like to peruse a good account of a run, no doubt; but when it comes to the adventures of *the hounds alone* "no thank you!"

Among recent contributions to hunting literature the most delightful is, I think, Sir Reginald Graham's *Fox-hunting Recollections*, and the most interesting chapter in that work was to me the one relating to the Burton Hunt and Lord Henry Bentinck, whose success as breeder of foxhounds was almost phenomenal. "But," as Sir Reginald remarks, "Lord Henry devoted a lifetime and his great talents to the breeding of hounds, but he well knew that his labour was in vain unless they were carefully and judiciously handled in the field. Every detail of information was recorded daily in his private kennel-

book, and on reference to its contents many passages are to be found showing the remarkably acute observation with which he watched the performance of his pack."

If writers of reports of runs were to take a leaf from Lord Henry's book and describe the doings of the various hounds who distinguished themselves in chase, I wonder much how their lucubrations would be received by the public. Would it help to create in the minds of those who were out an interest in the hounds? If they were told, for instance, that it was Dashwood who alone could hold the line on the dusty road, and did it for a mile, and so gave us the gallop, would anxiety be displayed to have a look at Dashwood next time he was out? Or if it were recorded that it was Tarnish who crossed the stream and was first to grapple with the fox at the end of the run, would Tarnish be sought for and recognised as a heroine?

Sir Reginald Graham's book would be most valuable if it contained nothing else but these extracts from Lord Henry Bentinck's private kennel-book, and those who care about hounds and their breeding will naturally search for his mention of the great Contest, of Tomboy, and other celebrities.

Alas! the scribe who reports the run has seldom the knowledge or facilities for notice which make Lord Henry's notes so deeply interesting, and I need hardly apologise to the author for now quoting a few of them; records such as these may well arouse interest and enthusiasm about hounds, beside show-

ing the deep thought and study of character displayed by the master:—

“*Comus*, 1844. A modest little dog; a very hard runner.

“*Tomboy*, 1845. Got the name of the schoolmaster of the pack, and was probably the best and most sagacious dog that ever ran in the Midland counties. These two dogs ran in the bitch pack. There was little to choose between them—in nose, brilliancy, or stoutness. Each dog was equally quick in dropping clear into the dry ditches and working a sinking fox out of them. But *Comus* could be led wrong by wild men or by a flashing pack of hounds, while neither man, nor hound, nor fox could make a fool of *Tomboy*. However wild men or hounds might be, he would quickly leave them and turn back to his fox. *Nothing could put him out of temper*, and in his last season he could still race with the puppies at night.

“*Contest*, 1848. A model dog, a most brilliant animal, noted for his hard running, flying the gates and double rails without touching them; and, too, for turning short without the need of a ‘drag chain.’

“*Ruler*, 1850. This was an extraordinarily brilliant dog, a very hard runner, and remarkable for the distance he could bring his hounds back to the spot where they last had it good, and for working the dry ditches; old *Rosebud*’s excellence came out in him.

“*Ringworm*, 1856. Noted for jumping out of the very centre of the pack when they were hunting it hill-way, turning back, and never being caught for two miles in the Gainsboro’ Woods.

“*Sontag*, 1860. Noted for taking the hounds through two miles of sheep, driving before them along the Clakby hillside in the great Wickenby run.

“*Riot*, 1861. Followed by her sister *Ruby*, is noted for having taken back her huntsman and hounds three large fields to the spot where they left their fox in Thornley. A very brilliant performance.”

Lord Henry declares that the hounds he purchased at Mr. Foljambe’s great sale in 1845 “made the pack”; and it is interesting to read that *Albion*, sire of the famous *Tomboy*, was not himself more than a

good, honest, quiet dog, not at all brilliant. Of others purchased from the Grove he writes that:—

“Driver was noted for bringing the fox’s brush to his huntsman out of Harpswell Gorse. His son Desperate showed the same characteristic. A fox having been left in a rabbit-hole in Carlton sandhills, the hounds were called away. Desperate gave the men the slip, went back to the hole, and scratched down to his cub, bit off half his brush, and brought it on to old Dick at Scampton. Driver’s little daughter, Dorcas, would never allow any dog, however big, to take the head from her—she invariably carried it home any distance.”

Of hounds purchased at Mr. Drake’s sale, Lord Henry in 1851 writes:—

“Hector and Herald were two good dogs until they became free of tongue.

“Smuggler, the crack dog in Drake’s pack, and a most brilliant animal until he turned rogue *after being brought out two days running by Stevens*. Despot also began very well, and ended by getting wide. *These hounds probably only went wrong from Stevens’ infamous feeding, and from being brought out day after day totally unfit to run.* Goodall picked out these hounds for me as being the best stuff in Drake’s kennel.”

This opinion, coming as it did from one of the greatest fox-hunters and most successful hound-breeder of all time, is surely worthy of the attention of all who go out hunting, and should impress those who read it with the fact that foxhounds are not mere hunting machines for them to ride after, but animals of peculiar and sensitive organisation, possessing intense individuality. So markedly is this the case that few in one pack have precisely the same characteristics, and the greatest care and atten-

tion is required to bring them out in the state that will enable them to hunt in the style admired by Beckford and appreciated by all true sportsmen.

There is much more to the same effect in Sir Reginald Graham's book, perusal of which would do far more than anything that I am able to indite in the way of creating an interest in hounds. The subject is one of vital importance to sport, for it is only when people begin to take a real interest in hounds and their work that they know what to do in the hunting-field.

Much good ink has been spilled, much good paper stained by many writers in the endeavour to secure fair play for hounds. Apparently it has all been in vain. Several Masters of Hounds, indeed, declare that this season "things are worse than ever," and one writes that "it really seems as if some people came out with us determined to do all they can to spoil our sport; yet they tell me this is not so, and that they only do it through ignorance. Through ignorance! When they are given eyes to see and to read with, and ears to hear—how can they be so ignorant?" I wonder what is the price of a booklet with which I have been presented, entitled *Rudimentary Rules Religiously Regarded by Riders with Foxhounds and Reasons Respecting Them*, by H. N.?

If the price be not prohibitive, I would recommend every M.F.H. to procure some copies and send one to each of the worst offenders in his Hunt—or, perhaps, the funds of the Hunt would stand the cost. These rules, however, though very amusing, are, as Artemus Ward expressed it, "rote sarkastic," and possibly have

already been taken literally by some who really seem to have read them, and are determined to carry out their behests.

I read the rules before going out to hunt on Saturday last, and, watching carefully, had ample opportunity of seeing how religiously many of them were obeyed in the morning. We had a slow hunting run—I think the best bit of cold hunting on the part of hounds and as good a piece of huntsman's work as I have seen this season. It ended with the orthodox kill, too, so that not a detail of the chase was wanting. In the line of the hunt also there were some extra big fences, and accurate descriptions of these and of the difficulties and dangers experienced in surmounting them, were freely circulated during the frequent checks and when the fox was killed.

It was at one of these checks, when hounds were apparently aware that there was a touch of a fox somewhere, though they could not carry a line, that I saw a young lady obey Rule 7 very implicitly. Rule 7 ordains, "If hounds check and you happen to be near, ride up among them without a moment's delay. Your presence cannot fail to help and encourage them—particularly if your horse is steaming." Though the pace had been slow, the horse was steaming—certainly he was in no condition—but then he had successfully encountered a large fence, and his rider was evidently determined that all should see that she was in a prominent position, so "in she went" among the hounds, who were spread about the big field trying hard to get fair hold of the line again.

The same heroine further distinguished herself by

implicit obedience to Rule 15, which says, "Whether hounds are running or not, jump unnecessary fences, ride over wheat, seeds, &c. You will thus show your lordly contempt for the mere tiller of the soil, over whose land you ride uninvited, and your laudable ignorance of all that appertains to him."

I must not quote more of these rules, but leave your readers to procure this booklet for themselves—it is published by Brown & Co., Salisbury. The malpractices these rules expose are not new, as may be gathered from the passages I have quoted: they are only the old crimes over again. The overriding, the heading of foxes, the riding over seeds and wheat, &c., the treading on the sterns of hounds on a road, the marching about in full cackle after the huntsman at a check, the sneaking on to a covert likely to be drawn instead of going to the meet, &c., &c.—only the old crimes against which we cannot protest too often or too strongly, and are held up to rebuke in this little brochure in sufficiently amusing fashion.

I have been accused of exaggerating the evil behaviour and ignorance of hunting folk, and of being unnecessarily severe upon ladies; but I can see and I can hear, and carry an easy conscience. Very numerous are the anecdotes that have been told to me of late, illustrative of the almost unspeakable ignorance on all subjects connected with the actual hunting of the fox, displayed every day hounds go out by those who follow them, and particularly by those on side-saddles. No doubt some of these anecdotes have a chestnutty flavour, such as the tale of the lady who was told to "mind the turnips," and said,

"Yes! Horrid things, aren't they? But my horse is very sure-footed." But almost a similar reply was pretty recently made to me when I offered some advice about riding through a field where the pulled turnips were lying on the land.

I often gaze with interest on the comely features of a lady who firmly refused to subscribe to the fowl fund on the grounds that she had never ridden over a chicken in her life, but can discern no lack of intelligence; and I have never been able to account for the reply given me very sweetly by one, for whose abilities I have the greatest respect, when I asked her to "ride the headland." "Yes, certainly I will," she said, "if you'll only show me which is the headland." Now, the headland was very fine and large. Had it been narrow I would have felt sure that she condescended to sarcasm as an excuse, implying that there really was no headland at all; but she had spent most of her life in the country, so no wonder I looked at her pretty hard.

Twice in the last few weeks have I seen in the neighbouring country one lady ride slap through the middle of a field of grass seeds, in spite of loud expostulations. Her excuse on each occasion was that her horse pulled so, and she couldn't hold him. Of course she should have been told that she had no sort of business to come out hunting on a horse that she couldn't hold. Perhaps, however, she is a very large subscriber, and will promptly settle for the damage she did.

I have just heard a delightful little anecdote from a southern English county. Hounds, after a sharp

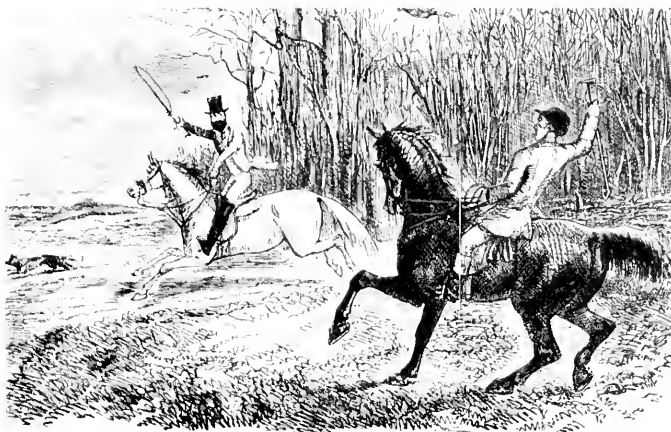


AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS.

Whip. "Hold hard, Gentlemen! Wheat! wheat! ware wheat!"

Young Farmer. "Come on, Gentlemen, never mind the wheat. It's only thirty shillings a quarter!"

(Drawn by John Leech.)



FOX STEALS AWAY FROM THE COVER, BEARDED FOREIGNER OF DISTINCTION GIVES CHASE.

Whipper-in (with excitement, loquitor): "'Old 'ard, there! 'old 'ard! where are you a-galloping to? Do you think you can catch a fox?"

Foreigner of distinction (with great glee): "I do not know, mon ami, but I will trai—I will trai!"

(Drawn by John Leech.)

gallop, checked. A lady, who had certainly ridden well to the fore, came up to a well-known sportsman who was intently watching for the recovery of the line, and in excited tones exclaimed, "Wasn't it grand? wasn't it grand? Talk to me! talk to me!" and because he failed to comply with what she, no doubt, thought a most reasonable request, that well-known sportsman got himself very much disliked.

How pleasant it must have been for Master, huntsman, and field to find their fox headed back on their drawing a covert by an individual who had gone on and posted himself at the far end instead of going to the meet! and when the fox was chopped in covert, what balm to their wounded spirits, what recompense for their disappointment to hear his excuse, "But I knew you would eventually come there"!

Apropos of this story, I cannot help quoting Rule 3 of the "Rudimentary Rules." "When you have ascertained by inquiry or your own superior intelligence, which covert is to be drawn, do not follow the hounds thereto if you think you know a shorter way. Go your own route and post yourself where you think they will eventually come. You will thus show your knowledge of the country, and be able to tell the huntsman if you have seen a fox come out and return into the covert. If you take seven friends with you your success will be all the more certain."

I have heard it said of late years that the tempers of amateur huntsmen are often unbearable; but

though I most strongly deprecate the use of violent or unseemly language in the hunting field, it appears to me that the modern M.F.H. is the most highly tried of human beings, and if ladies come out in the great numbers that prevail at present, and display the amount of ignorance that makes them so harmful to sport, they can hardly wonder if they hear words spoken that were best left unsaid.

“As a rule, too,” remarks a correspondent, “they contribute very little towards the finances of the hunt in which they do so much mischief”; if this reflection cross the mind of the highly tried M.F.H., it is not calculated to check the flow of his observations. Professional huntsmen complain very bitterly nowadays of the difficulties that are put in their way by ignorant riders; but it is very detrimental to them to acquire a character for incivility, or a reputation for bad temper, so they have to bottle up their wrath and dare not “blow off steam” like the amateur, who, if he is not blessed with the possession of a power of sarcasm, is reduced to profanity.

The feelings of the professional when the field cause annoyance and do mischief, was so amusingly set forth in Warburton’s verses that I think I may be permitted to quote some lines from his Cheshire “Huntsman’s Lament” :—

“Over-ridden ! Over-ridden !

All along of that ’ere check

When the ditch that gemman slid in ;

Don’t I wish he’d broke his neck.

I, to hunt my hounds am able,

If they only play me fair.

Mobbed at Smithfield by the rabble,
 Who a fox could follow there?
 Let the tinker ride his kettle,
 Let the tailor ride his goose,
 Not come here to rile and nettle
 Huntsmen, since it is no use.

“ ’Tain’t the red coat makes the rider,
 Breeches, boots, nor yet the cap.
 Gemmen! Gemmen! shame upon ’em!
 Gemmen plague me most of all;
 Worse then Bowden mobs at Dunham,
 Worse then cobblers at Pool Hall,
 Spurring at each fence their clippers
 When the hounds are in the rear
 (Regular Gemmen—self and whippers
 Tipping always once a year).

“ Well! soft sawder next I’ll try on,
 Rating only riles a swell;
 Mr. Brancker, Mr. Lyon, Mr. Hornby, hope you’re well
 Not the hounds am I afraid on,
 And I likes to see you first;
 But when so much steam is laid on,
 Bean’t you feared the copper’ll bust?
 Rantipole, I see’d him sprawling
 Underneath a horse’s hoof;
 Prudence only heard me calling,
 Just in time to keep aloof.

“ Tuneful now can only whimper,
 She who once sweet music spoke;
 Vulcan, he’s a reg’lar limper
 Ever since his leg they broke.
 Gemmen, who can ride like winking,
 Should behave themselves as sich,
 ’Tickler when the fox is sinking,
 And the hounds are in a hitch.

I who bean't the Lord and Master,
Though to do my best I tries,
I can only backwards cast, or
Else go home and d——n their eyes."

These lines were written in 1851—and in those days
very few ladies were riding to hounds!

CHAPTER IV

FIELD MASTERS AND HUNTSMEN, AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL

THERE is no possible reason why certain rules for the conduct of a field should not be observed as strictly as the regulations or the unwritten laws governing all other field sports. Why should not people stand still and remain silent at a check? Why should they not keep a little quiet when hounds have found their fox in a gorse covert? They ought, as a matter of course, to do so, and to consider so doing as much part of the business of hunting as riding over the fences after hounds when they are running. That they omit to do so can surely only be from ignorance, and were these complaints of huntsmen more thoroughly ventilated I cannot help thinking that the grounds for their lamentations would soon almost disappear.

“The cackling evil is a great one,” writes a huntsman, who is certainly one of the keenest and most successful of young amateurs. “It’s really awful sometimes when hounds check! Sounds like a pack of wild geese overhead, disturbs hounds, and I am sure it frightens foxes from breaking from gorses.

The women are the worst offenders, as the female voice is the more piercing."

This plaint is echoed by others, and by some is put in stronger terms. But no M.F.H. need imagine that anything but ignorance or thoughtlessness causes the conduct complained of, and he may feel assured that no one dreams of setting the authority of the M.F.H. on one side, or fails to "play up" to him, as well as he or she knows how to do it.

But what is to be done? It certainly is a little rough on the Field Master, where such a functionary exists, to expect him to go and deliver a lecture on their atrocious behaviour to a bevy of happy and excited ladies who are uncommonly well pleased with themselves, their horses, and the world in general, at a critical period of the chase. I often think a neat Christmas or New Year's card, exhibiting a set of rules and the reasons for such rules, might be advantageously distributed at this time of year.

Then there is the question of seeds, new grass, &c. And here I must remark that there are numbers of hunting ladies who, although they reside chiefly in the country, seem to take no sort of interest in the agricultural matters that surround them, even though botany and floriculture form favourite pursuits of their own.

When an amateur huntsman carries the horn there is no doubt that in these days of increased expenses, when every one seeks to get "a bit out of the Hunt" for damage to fields, fences, or fowls, a Field Master has become almost a necessity, though I certainly do not envy any man the job. Just think

of some of his duties! One dreadful part of his business is not to hold back, but to "whip up" the field—I mean when going from covert to covert. Furzingfield Gorse is going to be drawn, and the M.F.H. believes he will find a good fox there; it is three fields away from the high-road, and a narrow lane has to be traversed during a portion of the journey. Now, if he can only get the field up in time, and get them to stand all together on the hill, and, above all, to go up quietly! The Field Master looks back; straggling along the road in sections come his flock, some close to hounds, then the main column, "sections of fours" at intervals, next a pair or two, then solitary horsemen, and after that the last of these heaves in sight, round the bend of the road come a bevy who have branched off for refreshment, and now clatter up noisily. By the time our poor Field Master has stood by the open gate and said, "Come on, please, and don't make a noise," about five-and-forty times, his throat is as dry as a lime-burner's hat, his temper short, and his mind in a horrible state of anxiety lest he fail in his duty, or (awful thought!) lose his start.

We wish him well out of it; also out of his difficulties when, Reynard breaking in full view of the field, all are desperately eager for a start, which they shall not get, if he can help it, till hounds are well clear of the covert. Well, they get away at last. He "lets 'em go"—at least, all but Spurrier, who has crammed his horse at the nasty fence on the right in another direction to the line taken by hounds,

trusting to get "on their sterns" as usual, by jumping three fences instead of going through the gate at which the Field Master stands. And Rapid, too, confound him! Regardless of rule, that determined youth has jumped into the gorse and struggled through, much to the wrath of our official.

What a time he has had, poor Field Master! Why was he not gifted with a fine natural flow of language like Jack Spraggon to bar the way across the gate, then turn round, and poaching three lengths, sing out, "Now, ye tinkers, we'll start fair"?

He must ride up, too, must the Field Master, and he always "on the premises," or he is of no more use to the huntsman than "a side pocket to a cow, or a frilled shirt to a pig," as Mr. Soapey Sponge elegantly put it.

What chance will hounds have if they suddenly come upon cattle-stain when such fiery enthusiasts as Spurrier and Rapid are thundering along in their wake, determined that no soul shall live between themselves and the pack, if one who has [authority be not very handy to administer caution and rebuke?

It goes without saying that the Field Master, who is of course *en rapport* with the huntsman, must be possessed of powers which are approved and acknowledged by all who are members of the Hunt; and it follows that these powers should be bestowed upon him by the said members. I am told that the election of a Field Master should be a matter conducted by voting, each member sending in the name of the person he considers best qualified to



Photo]

THE LATE MR. ROBERT GRAY WATSON.

For 59 years Huntsman and Master of the Carlow and Island Hounds.
Huntsman to his Father, 1845-1869. Master and Huntsman, 1869-1901.
Master (Ed. Culwell, Huntsman) from 1901-1904.

[D'Arcy, Dublin.

act, the M.F.H. having a casting vote in the case of two persons receiving the same number of votes. It is hardly necessary to say that this official should be one whose position entitles him to respect and who is thoroughly acquainted with the country and the people, and who possesses *tact* in addition to the qualifications above detailed.

It may be said that with small, or comparatively small, fields the Field Master is not necessary; but I am only writing of the requirements of establishments where hounds are hunted by the Master himself, and in these days I believe that every amateur huntsman will be benefited by the assistance of a Field Master.

When the late Master of the Carlow and Island Hounds began his long career as huntsman, his father, Mr. John Watson, was M.F.H. and was present to guide and control; fields were small; complaints from farmers few; and hunting men with their hounds were educated to demean themselves as sportsmen. Thus, when Mr. Robert Watson assumed supreme command, he had to deal with a field whose obedience and trust in their Master had become traditional; and, being a born leader of men and possessed of exceptional talent and energy, he had little trouble in maintaining discipline when fields grew larger and difficulties appeared which were undreamt of by the fathers of the men who hunted with him in recent years. Such a thing as over-riding hounds, unduly pressing them at a check, or noise at the covert side would have struck horror into the habitués of the Carlow hunting-field, such

was the good order established there by long years of salutary if autocratic rule.

But from what I have observed in other countries I take the case I have mentioned to be a very exceptional one; and in crowded countries there can be no doubt of the utility of the Field Master. Those who go out hunting, unless they have tried to hunt hounds themselves, or are at least on very intimate terms with huntsmen and understand their feelings, have little idea how many things occur during a day's hunting to exasperate almost beyond endurance the M.F.H. who hunts his own hounds. The professional is not so badly off, for he always has a Master or some one in authority to check the ardour of the field and keep folk in order; and this will be the answer to a statement I have heard, viz., that professional huntsmen keep their tempers better than amateurs.

It has, I am afraid, been pretty frequently stated that men who take hounds take on also a bad temper and the use of profane language!

"The difference between an amateur and a professional huntsman," sententiously remarked a friend who is given to philosophising on most subjects, "is that the one swears at you, whereas, as a rule, the other does not. For I can see no reason why an amateur who has natural abilities and a real liking for the job should not make as good, or even a better, huntsman than a professional, provided he gives himself up entirely to the work, as some of them practically do. His education must serve him in many ways, for he will have studied all that has

been written on the subject, and powers of thinking and of observation are said to be fostered by education. His position should inspire more confidence in himself and give a sense of authority that the professional sometimes lacks, while I think the feeling that *noblesse oblige* will prevent his developing a certain slackness and anxiety to put in an easy day that becomes noticeable in some paid officials after a time."

Perhaps there was a good deal of truth in the above, and something like it is heard very often nowadays, for one pretty often hears the subject debated and many arguments brought forward on both sides. It has been said, for instance, that many ignorant young men, after hunting for a few seasons, without bestowing much thought or study on the subject, straightway imagine that they are capable of hunting a pack of foxhounds. They take the first vacant country that will have them—and a pretty mess they make of it! There is truth in this, also, no doubt; but such amateurs are not usually the men who remain long on the active lists of Masters of Hounds or gain for themselves the reputation that certain gentlemen huntsmen of the present day have deservedly acquired. Of one thing, however, there is no doubt, and that is that the number of amateur huntsmen has vastly increased in recent years. Out of 179 packs of foxhounds in England, 77 are hunted by amateurs. In Ireland there are 24 packs of foxhounds and only 3 professional huntsmen are employed; while Scotland, with 11 packs of hounds, possesses 4 gentlemen huntsmen.

These statistics are somewhat striking, and show

that the tendency of the age is for men in higher positions of life to occupy themselves in the practical management of everything connected with country life and open-air sports and pastimes.

The young sportsman who takes a country and undertakes to hunt it himself, unless he has been almost brought up to the business, has very little idea of the magnitude of the task he has set himself. Indeed, it is not often that the amateur huntsman proves a success unless he be to the manner born, or is an enthusiast who has tried carefully to master every detail connected with the chase, with the ultimate idea of qualifying himself for the post.

The names of really celebrated amateur huntsmen rise readily to the lips of men who know something of their subject when it comes under discussion, and I think it will be acknowledged that those who have held office for any length of time have served a very thorough apprenticeship. For instance, who should know more about fox-hunting and everything connected with the chase than the present Duke of Beaufort, who, after watching some of the best professionals of the age for several years, took the horn in his father's time, and hunted the historic pack with greater success than any professional that ever cheered a hound in Badminton? It is recorded that the late Duke of Beaufort considered "old Mr. Watson of the Carlow Hounds" to be one of the three best huntsmen, amateur or professional, he had ever seen—an opinion, I believe, shared by Colonel J. Anstruther-Thomson. Now Mr. Watson also was handed the horn by his father, and had



Photo]

[Lafayette, Dublin.

THE LATE MR. BURTON R. P. PERSSE.

M.F.H. Galway, 1852-1885.

been brought up to the business as thoroughly and completely as a young man can be prepared for any position he is to fill. Small wonder that the son of such a man should turn out also a celebrity; for no amateur ranked higher in the present day than the late Master of the Meath, Mr. John Watson.

The mention of Colonel Anstruther-Thomson, who first kept the Fife Hounds in 1849, reminds me that his father also was Master of the same Hounds. Two other famous amateurs in Ireland—Sir John Power, of Kilkenny, and Mr. Burton Persse, of the Galway “Blazers”—were both sons of Masters of Hounds.

Instances might be multiplied all over the kingdom, but the names of Willoughby de Broke, Chaworth-Musters, Galway, Corbet, Drake, spring quickly to the memory. To these men everything connected with the chase, hounds, horses, their management, the habits of the animal they hunted, and every minute detail came easily, for all their boyhood was spent among such surroundings that they could scarcely help attaining without effort knowledge that other men could only acquire after considerable time and experience.

But if the aspirant be really keen about fox-hunting, and have opportunities for observation, also if he has been able to study under different masters, there is no reason—given health and temperate habits—that the amateur should not equal the average professional. There will always, of course, be some bright particular stars in both spheres whose exceptional powers amount almost to genius, and I really believe that such men are born with a sort of instinct

in the matter of hunting a fox that cannot be acquired.

The power possessed by certain men over their hounds is also a gift. It cannot be learned ; but the first-rate huntsmen must possess it, and this power is certainly as often found in the amateur as the professional. The coming man, I am told, or rather the amateur who at once rushed to the front rank among huntsmen, is Mr. Charles McNeill, joint Master of the Grafton, who may be said to have graduated under Mr. Robert Watson in Ireland, while his residence in the Shires gave him every opportunity of comparing the methods of many different huntsmen of celebrity. Then, apart from his knowledge of horses and splendid horsemanship, Mr. McNeill has always been a "doggy" man, and we may be pretty sure that his quiet determination was eventually to become Master of a pack of foxhounds, and hunt them himself. He is also, like all his race, a lover of wild sport, and has a knowledge of the habits of wild creatures. Such a man was bound to succeed as a huntsman, and why should not such a man be fully the equal of the very best of professionals ?

Some say the professional holds a great advantage over the amateur, inasmuch as he is always among his hounds, sees them fed, is with them at exercise, and on the long road to covert and the weary journeys home. Now, although there are amateurs who do all this, and see fully as much of their hounds as any huntsmen do, *in places where a competent feeder is kept*, yet I am sure, from my own experience, that it is by no means necessary for the

huntsman to be always hopping in and out of his kennel to acquire the affection of and that mastery over his hounds which is, I contend, a heaven-born gift.

When Frank Beers hunted the Grafton Hounds his residence was a considerable distance from the kennel; but even when out cub-hunting, with thirty couple of hounds, in the great woodlands of Whittlebury and Salcey, his control over them was, I thought, marvellous, though he was certainly well supported by the best *pair* of whippers-in I ever saw.

The handiness of the Meath Hounds to Mr. John Watson has often been noticed, and I have been amused, when riding home from hunting with him, and the talk fell upon some particular hound in the pack, to see how the animal would spin round when his name was even quietly pronounced by the Master! There were seventy couple of hounds at Bective, and Mr. Watson had his time pretty fully occupied all the year round, so this control was somewhat remarkable.

It was my lot once to see a pack of hounds of some celebrity take the field under new ownership, the pack having been purchased in early autumn. It was a curious experience, and I am under the impression that several hounds took the opportunity to resign their connection with the establishment, and were never seen again; yet they were said to have been a handy pack under other management.

I have heard it said that the professional is more likely to be interfered with than the amateur by the crowding of the field when hounds are getting away, or when he is making his cast, because he does

not like to "turn round and damn the field"; but the professional has a Master who is not infrequently quite ready to do that for him, so let the huntsman keep his eyes on the pack, and not divide his attention between the hounds and over-eager horsemen as the amateur is often compelled to do.

Of all positions that can be imagined likely to affect the temper, that of *Master and Huntsman* is, I am sure, most calculated to do so, and those who carp most when the "talking" has been pretty decisive are invariably those who know very little about the management of a country or the many chances that may spoil a run or a whole day's sport.

"Bad language and abuse
I never, never use,"

said the Captain of H.M.S. *Pinafore*; and, of course, the language of the bargee should never soil the lips of a gentleman. Still, it is very hard to "sit and continue to smile" when, through ignorance or vanity, some member of his field presses hounds over the line, heads the fox, or commits some other enormity; and is he to remain dumb if he sees the best hound in the pack rolled over by the heels of a kicker, or jumped upon at a fence? Of course, the ideal huntsman should have a smiling face and a cheery word for every one save under most exceptional circumstances, and it certainly gives more pleasure to hunt with such a *rara avis* if he can be found, than with one who goeth forth to war with gloom upon his brow, and a tongue ready to find fault with everything and everybody.

After all, fox-hunting is a pastime to many—nay, most—of the field, and not an all-absorbing pursuit, as it is to some of us, and to the majority of Masters of Hounds. But the field is variously constituted (please remember, O M.F.H.!), and all have come out to enjoy themselves after their own fashion. Jones is going to hunt to-day and to play golf to-morrow; he really does not know which he likes best—his golf, perhaps! Smith hopes to have a gallop early, so as to get home and try for the fish he rose yesterday. Brown likes to see his friends, and is fond of horse exercise. Jenkins' doctor tells him to hunt for the good of his liver—these are a few out of many reasons for the presence of your field, O “Chase Master”! But to you the whole thing is business—business strict and all-important. Care and thought, time and trouble, expense and worry, are necessary—and experience—in order to bring about a good day's sport, which may be so very easily spoiled. It is, perhaps, then, too much to expect that the Master should have great consideration for the reasons which induce his field to hunt. He is there to show them sport if he can, and he means to try. On the other hand, the professional huntsman, till his fox is found, has few cares; he hopes for a scent, and he hopes for a “bit o' luck.” He looks to the Master “to keep the gentlemen back” till the hounds settle on the line, and not to let any one press him too closely when he has to cast for his fox. He, therefore, sets to work with unruffled temper and with unclouded brow.

His time of anxiety will begin with the actual chase.

He will see the team ploughing in front half a mile away, and the enclosure covered with top-dressing, partly spread, partly in heaps, and his soul will be filled with forebodings that these fields will be selected by the fox, who will also be sure to pass that farm where the lurcher and two terriers are always on the prowl. Then that dark cloud from the south-west is coming up, and Mr. Spurrier, on his best horse, is away "on their backs," and will be far too close if scent fails!

The amateur, however, has all the above in addition to the trials I have mentioned, so that, on the whole, I think the professional has the easier time, and, perhaps, therefore, should be the more successful.

CHAPTER V

SHORT MASTERSHIPS AND THEIR CAUSES

RESIGNATIONS from Masters of Hounds are fairly tumbling in ; never before, or since, the fatal year of the outbreak of the South African War have so many vacancies "at the end of the season " been announced.

In that year of the war the number of Masters and ex-Masters of Foxhounds and Harriers who took the field was a large one, but at the close of hostilities several of the returned warriors resumed the more pacific commands they had vacated, and some of them still retain them ; the fashion for very short Master-ships which seems to be customary nowadays did not then prevail. A few statistics respecting the tenure of office of our English Masters of Hounds may prove of interest just now.

In 1908 there were in England seventy-eight Masters of Hounds who had only held their positions for five years or less ; indeed, nineteen of these were elected in 1907 and twenty-four the year before ; and a good many of these gentlemen have now signified their intention of retiring in the spring. That these wholesale retirements, these very short Masterships,

are bad for the interests of fox-hunting there can be no denying ; and how bad they are only those who take an interest in the management of the country and the affairs of the kennel have any idea.

The magnitude of the evil can be readily imagined by sportsmen who think about the matter, though not, perhaps, by some who go out year after year with a subscription pack of foxhounds, yet never trouble to attend a Hunt meeting or inquire how any details are managed. There are hunting folk who expect everything to be provided for them—foxes, coverts, and hounds, and a country to ride over—and all very often for a small subscription, which, however, gives the privilege of growling at the Master and the sport he shows on every possible occasion. Yet not one bit of helpful work will they do for the Hunt they are graciously pleased to patronise.

To such folk a change of Mastership can only make a difference if the new-comer prove socially agreeable to them or the reverse, and so long as a fair average of sport seems to be maintained they would probably not object to a change every year or so. It might liven things up, stimulate curiosity, and give every one something to talk about in the off season !

Poor M.F.H.—of whose proud position Mr. Jorrocks declared that “of all the situations under the sun none is more enviable or more ‘onnerable’”—do you truly find it so very enviable in these twentieth-century days? But there must still be great glamour surrounding the position, for, though the candidates come, and often are gone before we really know them, yet the supply of youths who desire to tack

on to their names the magic letters M.F.H. is apparently unfailing.

Strange notions of the duties and responsibilities of the post some of those must have who essay to fulfil them; so strange, indeed, that some of the yearly resignations can surely cause no surprise. So many men of antecedents and surroundings apparently entirely different from those of the old race of fox-hunters, from whose ranks our M.F.H.'s were usually recruited, come forward now as candidates for the vacant posts, that one is set wondering how they got into their heads the notion that they were in any way suitable for the positions to which they aspire.

Truth to tell, in many cases the candidates have been persuaded to embark in this quest for distinction by some who have discovered in them merits that were unknown to themselves. Of one qualification, however, they could not be ignorant, for its power is everywhere acknowledged; no greater merit than money-bags can a man have, according to the almost general verdict of the day. Still, there are those who would prefer in the candidate some knowledge of hounds and kennel management, some previous understanding about the upkeep of a country and its coverts, to total ignorance on these subjects, and a general acquaintance with agricultural matters and country life to little else but a fat balance at the bank and desire for improved social position.

It causes some of the old brigade to smile when they hear of Masters of Foxhounds who seldom take the field, but who regard the fit of their servants'

breeches and the squaring of their horses' tails as matters of the deepest import, and worthy subjects for the exercise of their talent.

Shades of the mighty dead! It was not thus that Meynell, Warde, Osbaldeston, Foljambe, Chaworth-Musters, Assheton Smith, and Lord Henry Bentinck made their great names!

Although much interested in old hunting history, I cannot, as I write, call to mind whether in the golden age of fox-hunting such men as these at once leapt into pre-eminence, and in their very first season attained the success that placed them in the ranks of the great. They certainly were lucky if they did so, when one remembers the truth of the words of Mr. Richard Bragg, the "swell" huntsman in *Soapey Sponge*. "Have a little regard for a huntsman's reputation," said he. "Remember that it rises and falls with the sport it shows."

One of the cleverest amateur huntsmen I have ever seen was, in his first season, considered to be so laughable a failure that folk would hardly come out and hunt with him, and some who should have supported him went to hunt elsewhere. But, seriously, it is not by his first or his second season that any one can judge of the capabilities of a Master or huntsman; and, indeed, it appears to me most unlikely that good sport will be shown in the first season when both Master and huntsman have been changed, these duties nowadays being very often combined by an amateur. The new-comer has everything to learn, and sets to work with zeal. There is no trouble about the hounds, perhaps, though likely as not he may have

his own ideas about feeding, exercise, and condition that have not been those of his predecessor; and remember, any alteration in the treatment of hounds and their daily routine will make a difference—it may be for good or ill, but a difference it certainly will make. Then comes cubbing time, and the learning of the country *when the leaf is off*. A bad scent in his first cub-hunting season utterly extinguished the success of a friend of mine in the eyes of some of his neighbours for at least a year and a half. Then with indifferent scent in the regular season the unfortunate new-comer may find April upon him before he has learned in what parts of his country scent can be expected to hold—rather an important matter to the huntsman when in chase of a fox!

But suppose all goes well for the first season: good scent, good foxes, and fine weather for the critics. All talk goes very well, be sure, for the M.F.H. then—perhaps a shade too well! Never was such a fine fellow! Never was such sport shown! Who dares to suggest a “crab” of any sort? He is a popular idol at once, and his popularity may carry him through next season possibly, even if his sport be of very inferior quality to that shown at first. But let scent in the third season be bad; let ill-luck come to his kennel in the shape of disease or distemper, and I fear very little will be heard in his favour, very few allowances made. He feels compelled to go home rather early for the sake of hounds, many of them, perhaps, only just strong enough yet for a short day. “How slack he is getting,” is the cry. Good luck attends the foxes, and they escape time after time.

¹ *Hounds, Gentlemen, Please.*

Probably the M.F.H. alone, by diligent subsequent inquiry, discovers by what curious means the hard-pressed fox escaped—and some of these escapes are really very wonderful. But the critics settle that the hounds have become slack, and cannot kill their foxes. “Slack huntsmen make slack hounds,” &c., &c., and so the bad word goes round, and the erstwhile successful M.F.H. soon finds many detractors, and will need a great turn of luck in his favour to prevent the adverse feeling becoming so hostile as to find expression at the next annual Hunt meeting.

Of course the M.F.H. will have friends among the sportsmen who know and appreciate with gratitude his endeavours to show sport or to improve the country; and, secure of their goodwill, he may treat lightly what others say; but, although a Master of Hounds, he yet may actually be possessed of a sensitive soul, and to know that blame is being laid when only gratitude is due is more than many folk can bear with equanimity. If the members of a subscription Hunt have their affairs in the hands of a strong committee, and if the committee be properly constituted—that is, if it be composed for the most part of sportsmen who know something about the internal economy and management of a Hunt establishment as well as about the management of a country, the chances are that the M.F.H. will receive proper support as long as he tries to do his best, and has efficient horses and servants; but let a hint be entertained that another man would be willing to take the hounds on a reduced subscription, or (if the present M.F.H. hunts his own hounds) that he

would employ a professional huntsman, and the committee must be strong indeed to stem or disregard the tide of dissatisfaction that is very sure to set in.

"The ideal hunting establishment," said a very great ex-M.F.H. to me the other day (somewhat to my astonishment), "is, *of course*, a first-rate Master with a first-rate professional under him." Now, the speaker has always been regarded as one of the best huntsmen ever seen, so I could not help expressing my surprise at hearing such a sentiment from him.

"Yes," he said, "over and over again I have felt that it would be far better for the hunting of the country if I had a professional under me; there is so much to see to, so many things to direct, so much to be done in connection with each day's sport, that I defy a man who is hunting hounds to do properly. Why, I hardly ever went out hunting in my life that I did not want to get hold of somebody to talk and consult with over something connected with hunting: perhaps about that day's draw, perhaps about something that happened the last day, or wanted looking after for the next day, and I couldn't do it properly riding in the middle of a pack of hounds."

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that in the present day many Masters would not accept the position if they were not allowed to carry the horn; and, though I admit that it is trying supporters rather high to let a *complete* tyro experimentalise and take up the position previously filled by some huntsman who has made his mark, yet I cannot suppose that any one who had not proved himself to be a sportsman and a lover of hunting and of hounds would be lightly

accepted, unless, of course, he expressed his intention of "running the whole show"; when hunting men, more than ever they did, seem anxious to get their sport at other folks' expense. At all events, whether the new-comer be tyro or old stager, let him have a clear field and a free hand, and be in no hurry to gauge his merits or demerits. Remember that there are good things brought about by fox-hunting apart from flying bursts, gruelling runs, or a constant succession of extraordinary sport; that even a moderate season's sport is productive of much pleasure, much good-fellowship, and wholesome recreation. The good days will come, and the good seasons, all the quicker for kindly unanimity of feeling which, making things easy for the new-comer and bearing lightly on mistakes, will do much to further the welfare of fox-hunting.

Doubtless in the present day there are surrounding the M.F.H. difficulties that were quite unknown to the great ones of old—difficulties which in many countries are entirely beyond the unaided efforts of the most zealous Master of Hounds, even if he be born in the country over which he rules. Let these numerous and increasing difficulties be acknowledged. A great many of them must be well known to all, while others not quite so often discussed are realised by those who live the most of the year in the country.

I think it must be allowed that acquaintance with the details of the duties of a M.F.H.—as the best of our Masters recognise those duties—is a more important qualification than wealth alone; and I am sure that frequently of late years ignorance must have

caused the new Master to feel uneasy on his throne, and determined him to abdicate before his second season had fairly begun.

Utterly unused to the amount of organising work that is expected of him, with no idea of the amount of time that, even on non-hunting days, he must devote to it, or of the tremendous increase of his correspondence, with as many applicants to see him in the morning as used to stand in the London ante-chamber of a nobleman in Georgian days, no wonder many a modern M.F.H. who has not had an opportunity of getting behind the scenes before he took the office is soon aghast at the multiplicity of his duties; and, if not born with an extraordinary keenness for the chase, soon gets deadly weary of them.

The complete tyro, then, who has had no previous knowledge of the duties of the position, can seldom be expected to celebrate a very long reign even if blessed with much riches. A very common reason also for the short duration of the reign of the modern Master is the unnecessary expense that his predecessor in office has thought fit to incur.

Not very long ago I was looking over a portfolio of photographs of various packs of hounds, their Masters and servants. A friend who was staying with me picked up one of the big pictures, looked at it, and gave a long-drawn whistle. "I thought once of going in for that pack," he said, "but that style of thing wouldn't suit me at all." The photograph represented the usual group of hounds with their attendants in the background, and these, in this picture, numbered (inclusive of the Master) six indi-

viduals, booted, capped, and spurred. Let a man in these days bring four or five men in scarlet besides himself to the meet, and we shall be told how "splendidly he does things," and much wonderment will be expressed if he fail to show sport "after all the trouble he takes."

His successor, unless a man of very strong character, will hardly like to substitute for six long-tailed horses with riders complete in scarlet, white breeches, silver chains and whistles, his modest equipment of first and second whippers-in, equipped in brown cords and mounted on short-tailed nags, with a light lad in dark tweed and breeches and leggings to ride second horse. If, however, he manfully sets his face against what Anstruther Thomson scornfully termed the "pageantry of the chase," he will want the very best of luck in his first season to enable him to show such sport as will silence all detractors, or he will very soon find out that he is held to "do the thing badly," which cannot fail to aggravate even a philosopher, and possibly his first season may be his last.

It appears to me, if fox-hunting is to last, that economy will have to be studied, and that the endeavour of the twentieth-century sportsman should be to restore as much as possible the simplicity that the sport has lost since it became ultra-fashionable. We are told that the great crowds which now ornament many of our hunting-fields are not wanted by either the farmers or the residents, and that the field-money which is levied was instituted with a view to lessening these crowds. Now we used to hear not very long ago a good deal also about the "Simple Life." What if

hunting folk turned their thoughts that way? Why not meet at ten o'clock instead of an hour later? Why not wear brown cords and 'hogany boots, as our fathers often did, and let the fashions for the hunting-field emanate from the country, and not from the neighbourhood of New Bond Street? If the kit and accoutrements of the fox-hunter cost no more thought in these days than they did seventy years ago, I am very sure that hunting would lose much of its interest for a great many. I am speaking generally, of course, for there have always been some double-distilled dandies in the hunting-field, and there always will be.

The great crowds might possibly diminish under a ten o'clock regime and the lack of display and ostentation; the country in consequence might be easier to keep, and the general expenses of a Hunt establishment might be somewhat decreased.

To economise, however, where hounds as well as horses are in the case, can only be done by one who has great experience of all country matters, and is pretty well acquainted with farming operations. Such an one with leisure to undertake the duties of M.F.H. is very hard to find in these days, though really not quite such a *rara avis* as might be supposed.

For some reason or another, as a rule, the joint Mastership has but a short life. The ordinary idea of this combination seems happy—that one M.F.H. shall find the experience and the other the expenses—but in practice it does not last very long, any more than the hunting of a country by a committee.

I fully believe that if this dreadful idea of capturing a very wealthy man and making him pay for our amusement were, to a great extent, abandoned, and the notion of getting a first-rate sportsman and manager substituted for it in our minds, we should find it advantageous for the future of fox-hunting; and I feel sure that the right men would be forthcoming, *provided* that we who live in the country paid as much attention to the management of it as we ought to do; but this requires a considerable amount of organisation and energy, and the enlistment of the help and sympathy of every one who is at all favourably disposed towards fox-hunting. With the right men once secured we should hear little more of twelve-month Masterships.

As things are at present managed, or rather mismanaged, in too many hunting countries, only a very keen and zealous sportsman who is willing to devote almost his entire time to the work, is likely to remain for more than a few years at the head of affairs. Now this, surely, is not as it should be, and, as a correspondent points out, "there must be defective organisation in the system of district management" that makes so much of the burden fall on the shoulders of the Master.

I could tell of a country to which a lucky but most excellent and popular sportsman will shortly succeed, where, owing to the cordial co-operation of the hunting community with the retiring Master, this new-comer will find few of the cares that overburden many a modern M.F.H. In that country the Master had hard work at first, but he is an organiser, and knew what



Photo]

MR. R. W. HALL-DARE.
Master of the Island Hounds.

[Lafayette, Dublin,

was before him; his ideas were carried out, and every sportsman there feels that things are on the right footing now, and that their efforts have put the country into such order that the incoming Master has only got to *hunt* it—they will do the rest.

The country, in fact, is properly managed. The District Managers are few in number, but superintend very clearly defined areas. They are, of course, hunting men who reside at home in summer, and are popular in their own localities. The manager of each district becomes the Field Master on such days as hounds meet within his district, and is for the time being the confidential adviser of the M.F.H.; he also collects the field-money. This arrangement appears to me a good one. Under it the District Manager is found to take an immensity of trouble to ensure a good day's sport when hounds come his way, and, as this is a matter that also concerns him, he does his best that the amusement shall be as inexpensive as possible. Therefore he will warn his neighbours who have young horses or stock of other kinds in their fields that the hounds may be expected, and no claims for foals or calves who have made untimely appearance in this vale of sorrows need be feared. The haunt of the outlying fox will be known to the District Manager, and he will lead the way to the retreat that shelters that terror of the fowl-yard, while every orthodox covert in his district will be his special care. He will arrange for the cutting down of the gorse coverts when they have grown too high, the repair of their fences, and the condition of the artificial earths. A

fox going to ground in the country within his jurisdiction will probably be safe if left by the hounds, and by the month of June he will be able to tell the M.F.H. how many litters have been brought out within the confines of his territory. He will be indefatigable in trying to procure good walks for puppies in his neighbourhood, and will keep a friendly eye upon them during the time they are at quarters, while it is hardly necessary to say that he will walk a couple himself for the M.F.H.

Often of high social position, the District Manager's utility is rather increased when this is the case, while he extends the sphere of his own influence and popularity in the country by coming into direct communication with many whom he might otherwise be personally unacquainted with and who often come to seek his opinion or advice on matters not altogether connected with hunting.

The District Manager, I think, should certainly be *ex officio* a member of the Hunt committee—a body who have so many responsibilities thrust upon them in these days that selection of the members needs to be made with great care. There is nothing so difficult in the country as to get together a body of men to do three hours' work. Meetings are usually held in the county town, and half an hour after the minutes of the last meeting have been read and signed, the members begin to melt away. One retires to do some shopping, another to the bank, a third to look at a horse; and the gathering is reduced before long to very attenuated proportions, though if the three or four remaining are willing to accept responsibility

they will probably do the business better and more speedily than if a larger number were present. Still, when it comes to a question of the disbursement of money, there is often hesitation on the part of the two or three who are gathered together, and the meeting is adjourned.

With an efficient Hunt secretary, however—and how much most Hunts owe to their secretaries!—and a good working committee, it should be possible so to arrange matters in a hunting country that the M.F.H. need have little to do in the off season except the regulation of his Hunt establishment. Why, after all, should more be expected of him? Why should it be said M.F.H.'s work is really beginning when our sport is ended? He will have plenty to occupy his mind in seeing after his stables, and his servants, and the breeding of his pack, but need not necessarily be expected to stay at home like a nut in its shell all the summer.

Not very many years ago I heard objection gravely taken to the name of a candidate for the mastership of a country because he was a polo player, and so would be “gadding about all the summer instead of looking after his country”! No wonder that master-ships are short, if such ideas prevail! The fact is that the modern M.F.H. cannot do it all “off his own bat,” as is so often expected of him. He should be thoroughly supported by all interested in fox-hunting in his country, who should endeavour to make his task an easy one. He may have to work hard at first, but the work should be the work of organisation, for a leader is always wanted; but after the first year or

so, instead of wishing to retire from the overburden of work, the burden should have become light and easy, and the pleasure of seeing the good results of his labour should begin.

No doubt the M.F.H. is the proper person to organise where organisation is wanted. Who else is to do it? And to organise well, it follows that he must have a good knowledge of all details of the matter he is taking in hand. Where the new M.F.H. is a local man, we will suppose that he must possess some knowledge at least that will be of great use to him in his career, and, speaking generally, a local man of position and influence is of all others the most desirable for a Master of Hounds, though such men, willing to undertake the work, are not now so plentiful as they were at the beginning of the last century. "Get a *sportsman* to hunt your country," was the advice given by a well-known magnate of the hunting world after a long dispute had caused a vacancy; "everything wants putting into order—the country, and the people in it." The sportsman was found, and it was done; but money alone could never have healed the breaches and effected the much-desired change, nor will money too freely expended be conducive to the proper management of a country. With subscription packs I hold that the money for the management should come from the men of the country, and not from the Master. It was Mr. Delmé Radcliffe who said that a Master of Hounds would always find his hand in his pocket, and must always find a guinea there. Squire Delmé Radcliffe was an M.F.H. in the thirties. Had he kept hounds in the reign of

Edward VII., he might have written "both hands in his pockets"; but in a properly managed country, where economy is studied, and the new M.F.H. has no lavish spendthrift to follow, a smaller sum than the guinea should do to line the pocket.

A word more before closing this chapter on the short duration of joint masterships.

In some cases there may be a reason, and a very excellent one for their brevity; for it may be the wish of the incoming M.F.H. to share responsibility with the Old Hand who is about to retire, and so learn from him all that is to be known about the country and the manner of hunting it.

In this case, when the partnership is dissolved and the newcomer reigns alone, it may be safe to prophesy that his rule will not be a short one; and I can imagine no better preparation for the beginner than sharing the work for a time of a practised M.F.H. who has every detail at his fingers' ends.

CHAPTER VI

HORNS, HOLLOAS, AND DOG LANGUAGE

“THE horn of the huntsman is heard on the hill,” exclaims the impassioned lover in the Irish ballad to his sleeping mistress; and it is to be hoped that the appeal was successful, and that the fair Kathleen awoke from her slumbers, got dressed, and mounted in time to see the fox found.

Much mention has been made of horns whenever it has pleased poets to sing of the chase, and not even Anstruther Thomson’s penchant for the whistle has been the means of introducing that instrument to the favour of huntsmen, who still stick to the time-honoured “foot of tin,” copper, or silver, and use it more or less sparingly, each according to his idea as to the utility of the sounds he produces. Unlike our Gallic and other Continental friends, we have no hard-and-fast rules for the use of the horn. No Moot, Reeheat, Prise, or Menée as in olden time to mark with musical honours the different episodes of the chase. In our hunting-fields the noises made by the huntsman’s horn are often discordant enough, and I do not think as much attention is given to this art

of horn-blowing as it demands, or as it formerly received.

A weird blast is heard at intervals during the day ; if quickly repeated it is supposed to mean the "chink" or "double" of the horn that proclaims the flight of the fox ; if, without any particular "linked sweetness" it is "long drawn out" to a most melancholy and funereal wail, we are then aware that the covert by which we stand has been drawn blank. That is about all we have to learn of the uses of the "merry horn," except perhaps that two short, quick, high notes convey to the whippers-in that all the hounds are present and moving on.

Nevertheless, we are treated by some huntsmen to a wonderful amount of horn-blowing during the day : these are full of queer noises and sounds, and seldom lose a chance of conveying the instrument to their lips. Others again are so sparing of its use that one wonders why the horn is carried at all. For choice, however, surely the silent huntsman is better than the noisy one? He is certainly less irritating, and is, I think, less likely to do harm. Everlasting horn-blowing has doubtless an unpleasant effect on the nerves of the listener and becomes a mere mechanical habit on the part of the performer, while it is treated as such by the hounds themselves, who in time pay no heed to the sounds.

It has often amused me to watch the proceedings of one of these perpetual musicians. The Master gives the signal to move on from the meet ; out comes the trumpet—*Toot!* A cart comes along the road—"Get over hounds." *Toot!* "Take first turn to the left

at the cross roads." *Toot!* Hounds stray on ahead—"Gently, Rumager; gently on there." *Toot, toot!* "Leu into covert there." *Toot, toot, toot!* and horn-blowing accompanies every third step of the horse, and follows every alternate cheer till the covert is drawn, and the sound has become a weariness to the spirit.

Then, when the chase begins and the fox is viewed away, that is the time for the real solo, the "concerted piece," with lots of flourishes and variations, and every blast no doubt conveys pleasure to the performer; but we may notice, perhaps, that hounds do not appear to fly to the sound with marvellous alacrity, nor do the strains boil up very genuine enthusiasm on the part of the field.

It must be observed that these remarks on the use of the horn are in no way intended to be didactic, and must be regarded simply as observations made in the spirit of inquiry by one who has never carried the horn. I have, however, opportunities of seeing (or hearing) a good many different wielders of the instrument in the course of the hunting season, and noticing so great a variety of style among these practitioners, I am impelled to record some of these observations and the ideas they suggest.

Mr. Robert Watson—whose great reputation as a huntsman needs no mention from me—was of all others the man whose methods I have had most opportunity of noticing. In my youth I often heard his merits discussed by my seniors—by men, too, who were, I believe, well qualified to discuss an opinion. I have heard exception taken to him as being too

silent a huntsman, although he was gifted with a magnificent voice, resonant and melodious, and further produced a most stirring note upon a horn. Silent he may have been, yet how seldom did his hounds chop a fox in covert, and when did he ever leave his field behind when hounds went away with their fox? His quiet encouragement to the pack to try (sounds which a friend declares reminded him of the conjugating of Greek verbs, *eloimi*, *philoimi*), varied by a peculiar hound-like call, "Eelyow, ellyow!" contrasted strongly with the bellowing invocations to "push him up" and "roust him up," accompanied by loud blasts of the horn, which some huntsmen use. In drawing, Mr. Watson, as a rule, used his horn not at all, except to move his pack from one part of the covert to another. But his "Hoick, hoick, hoick!" was good to hear when a "finder" opened, and the "Eloo-loo, eloo-loo, eloo-loo—at him!" which followed, used to set the bushes shaking and the horses capering.

It is true that most of Mr. Watson's coverts were small, the woodlands few, and the gorses plenty; and I believe that in really large woodlands a free use of both horn and voice is most necessary to keep hounds in touch, and also to keep in touch with the field.

The best performer on a horn that I ever heard was the late Frank Beers, when huntsman to the Grafton Hounds, and next to him, in my experience, I would place Mr. Langrishe, the late Master of the Kilkenny. Both these men could "bring a tune out of a gas-pipe," and Beers, in his immense woodlands

was no doubt greatly served by his perfect command of the instrument. In the Kilkenny country, however, this great execution is not so much called for.

I take it that the horn should give forth no sound that has not a meaning to the hounds, and that the field also should be able to know what is meant by the various blasts; and, as we are not aware that hounds, however "musical" they may be, have a quick ear for tune, I think it follows that the fewer variations of sound they are treated to the better, if the horn is to be efficacious.

An occasional *alert* note during a long draw seems to enliven the work. Quickly repeated *once* or *twice* when the find is proclaimed, and accompanying the "Hoick together," that note seems to stimulate the listening pack to rush to support their comrades' cry. Then the "doubling" of the horn when—supreme moment of all!—he is away, and the huntsman gets his pack together for the pursuit; surely there should be no mistaking *that* sound, and all foxhounds should love to fly to it. What vim and fire Frank Beers managed to put into those quick, stirring notes! And Mr. Watson, too! How often I hear it in my dreams, my good dreams!—"Tally-ho, gone away! Tally-ho, gone away!" it seemed to say. "Better be quick; better be quick; better be quick!"

No, there certainly should be no mistaking the "gone away" call, and none other that resembles it should, I think, *ever* be sounded. I have heard a "double" sounded for the view in covert, and even in a gorse covert a huntsman of my acquaint-

ance sounds it when he views a fox across a ride. I cannot think this unusual call desirable and have myself seen it bring hounds *out* of covert, while the field, not understanding it, catch up their reins and gallop along the covert sides, creating sometimes a certain amount of confusion. The huntsman who uses it, however, believes that hounds are thereby stimulated to get together and press their fox. He, moreover, believes in the horn as an inspiring adjunct of the chase, and uses the instrument more freely than many of his fraternity, both in and out of covert; yet his capability as a huntsman is undeniable.

Then there is that long-drawn, melancholy note (of which I have written before), when the covert is blank—melancholy, but necessary, and, of necessity, melancholy. That, too, should not be varied; all huntsmen should blow it in the same way, if only for the information of the field, all the world over or “where’er the English tongue is spoke,” which is pretty much the same thing; and, as a matter of fact, there are few parts of the world where the sound of the English hunting-horn has not been heard. The sharp “twit, twit,” telling that hounds are all on, is another of the general calls that admit of no variation, and are known to all hunt servants and, I imagine, to all fox-hunters.

But I have heard considerable variety in the sounds given forth when the fox goes to ground, or lies dead surrounded by the baying pack. Yet it seems to me that there also there should be no uncertainty, but that all should know the sound of a

mort, and all huntsmen should sound it in the same manner.

Judging from effects, then, it would seem that the huntsman who is chary of the use of his horn, as a general rule, has the best chance of finding his summons promptly obeyed when he does "wind a blast," and it is interesting to note the eagerness with which the pack, who know that business only is meant, will fly to the sound when they hear it; and surely it is most important that they should do so. At a check, for instance, on a windy day, with hounds spread out over a field vainly trying to recover the lost clue, the huntsman, wishing to bring them together for a cast in another direction, touches his horn. *Vox humana* is of no use, the wind will scatter his "Yeo-yeote" to the deuce; but a ringing blast of the horn, if they have not learned from overuse to disregard the sound, will pick their heads up at once, and bring them crowding round his horse's heels.

Then mark the eagerness with which hounds obey the "doubling" of *some* horns when the fox is gone! How they fairly tumble over one another in their haste to get to the spot where that stirring obligato is being performed. When this is noticed, I think, it may, as a rule, also be observed that the huntsman is not a lavish user of the instrument.

It is doubtless an art that takes a certain amount of time and practice to acquire, this winding of the merry horn, but I think it is worth acquiring. Many celebrated huntsmen of the past have been much praised for their "excellent note on a horn," and

the great Peter Beckford was probably the cause of the adoption of the straight horn by recommending its use in his immortal work; and, as it seems to be "the horn which is the most readily sounded and is heard the furthest," it is therefore the best. There is no musical knowledge required to bring forth the desired sounds, but a certain knack must be attained in order to produce at once, with certainty, and when a horse is in motion, the few necessary calls which we have been considering. We read that Mr. Assheton Smith, at an advanced period of life, sounded his horn while leaping a gate. Needless to say the gate had five bars, but we are not told the number sounded by that fiery veteran during his leap.

And if the huntsman should use his horn with discretion, how much more should the follower of hounds be chary of raising *his* voice! There are few inhabitants of these islands who do not feel themselves impelled to shout on the unexpected appearance of a fox; and if the view is obtained in a hunting country the shout is almost certain to assume the sound of a genuine "view-holloa"; yet from a fox-hunter's point of view this is pretty sure to be wrong; for "nine times out of ten that you holloa when you see a fox," says a celebrated M.F.H., "you had better have kept your mouth shut."

To begin with the view-holloa, the "Tally aw-a-ae!" There is little doubt that very often this preliminary to the chase is most unnecessary. The whipper-in views "the lad" away from a gorse covert, and most probably a good many of the field see him too. The whip waits till the fox is well over the first fence, or

till he counts twenty, and then out rings his rattling view-holloa, and if he has "a good pipe," as Mr. Jor-rocks expressed it, the sound is most inspiring, and is warmly admired. But what are the odds that every other man who has seen the fox also does not then add his quota to the noise? The whipper-in, of course, if he knows his business, has placed himself as near as he can to the spot whence the fox broke covert before tallying him away; but it will be noticed that the other horsemen who have viewed the fox and think it is incumbent upon them also to shout, raise their voices from various different places, though a little reflection should tell them that though hounds are supposed to come away to a holloa, they are not wanted except where the fox broke, and therefore they had better have remained silent.

Indeed, though admitting the exhilarating sound of the view-holloa, and the necessity for its vigorous use at times, the "silent system" when getting away with a fox is the one that commands the admiration of the writer. If the huntsman can see the whipper-in when the fox goes away—as he so very often can—why raise the shout at all? Why not raise the cap only? Even if the whipper-in is invisible to the huntsman, but his cap-in-air is seen by the field, a word from one of the horsemen to the wielder of the horn will bring him out, and possibly with the body of the pack at his heels without flurry, noise, or confusion, and with no over-excitement among the hounds; and then it is that he has the real chance of getting well away with his fox.

Mark, when you have an opportunity, kind reader

of these reflections, the difference in the gait of the fox who slips away unobserved, as he thinks, and unholloa'd, from that of the animal who, after gliding smoothly along for a hundred and fifty yards or so is greeted by a perfect storm of yells and shouts. He was covering the ground at a nice pace before, but at those sounds he puts on such a spurt as few animals can equal till he has placed at least one more fence between himself and the hateful noise. Madened by the shouting and the horn-blowing, the hounds come tearing and leaping out of covert, their heads in the air, and either overrun the scent or, flinging on, fail to pick it up quickly at the critical period when the fox is placing many fields between himself and his pursuers.

In the other case the fox, stealing quietly along, sees no particular cause for extra hurry, and, unless going away down wind, hears nothing to put him in a frantic state of alarm; the distant sound of a horn he has heard before, and also the chiming of the pack, so he does not alter the smooth, stealing pace at which he started till hounds, who are well settled to the line from the first, drive him into quicker flight by getting unpleasantly close to him, and, being over all their initial difficulties, do not let him increase his lead very much if there be anything like a scent.

We have supposed the field and foot-people to have remained silent in this case until the servant has raised his voice; but how often do we hear the irrepressible shout raised before the fox has crossed the first field when "Tally-ho back!" is the cry that generally

follows. Of a hunt in the southern part of Ireland, the members of which are proverbial for their forward riding and daring horsemanship, it is related that on the fox breaking* from a well-known gorse in view of the whole field, each man exclaimed in what he imagined to be a thrilling whisper, "Hush! don't say a word!" but the volume of the whisperings was such that the fox doubled back incontinently.

How many good runs in Ireland have been spoiled by the uncontrollable "Look at 'um out!" from the foot-people by the covert-side, as soon as they view the fox away. Irishmen, however, are hopeless where shouting is concerned. They must "let a bawl" to relieve pent-up excitement, I suppose, when occasion offers; but the experienced huntsman who knows the ways of Erin's Isle treats all holloas from country folk with caution, if, indeed, he does not disregard them altogether.

"An Irishman, when hounds are out, will holloa. It may be to call his friends to see the hunt, or simply to relieve his own excited feelings at the sight of the chase or to draw the horsemen towards him to see the 'lepping,' or to decoy them away from the neighbourhood of his own seeds or wheat. Then if the huntsman does go to the holloa, as likely as not Pat will tell him which way the fox he sees 'every Sunday morning' usually travels; or maybe, an absolutely imaginary tale will be told with an excitability and engaging appearance of truth which would deceive any but the old stager who has been thus caught too often."

The above pronouncement, printed more than twelve



MR. BRIGGS, NOT BEING GOOD AT HIS FENCES, GOES THROUGH
THE PERFORMANCE OF OPENING A GATE.

(Drawn by John Leech.)



EXCESSIVELY POLITE.

Well-bred Man. "Your horse seems a little impatient, sir!
pray go first!"

(Drawn by John Leech.)

years ago, is certainly true in the present day. I have a great friend who lives on the low hillside behind this place, and not long ago I met him the day after a run from a gorse in the valley below. "Didn't you hear us roaring yesterday?" he said. "Why couldn't yez come and hunt the great fox that wint for Newtown?" "But, man alive," I said, "couldn't you see we were on another fox going bang in the other direction? What the deuce was the good of keeping on shouting? You might have got the hounds off our fox, if they had checked, with all that yelling. "Shure that's what we wanted," he naively replied, "the other was the lad we laid out for ye to hunt; he'd have given a great chase, and we'd had a great view of ye entirely."

If we reflect at all on the subject, I think we shall conclude that one very seldom should be tempted to give a holloa out hunting, and that we should never do so without due consideration. If we see the fox and hounds have checked, and if we are absolutely certain it is our hunted fox, if also the huntsman cannot see our hat held up in the air (which is better for the hounds than any holloa), then we may "let go" our holloa with a will; but it must be remembered that one never should holloa unless you can get on to, or close to, the ground over which the fox has passed before raising the voice.

If a fox is viewed by one of the field at some distance from hounds it must be borne in mind that though he appears to be a run fox, he is not necessarily the hunted fox. Hounds have a brace of foxes travelling in front of them twice as often as any of us imagine.

It is very dangerous to give vent to a holloa on account of "information received"; far better to get information and gallop back with it to the M.F.H. Remember that a pedestrian who holloas because he sees a fox may be viewing him from a distance of half a mile, and however glad he may be to see the hunt, he is not the least likely to run to the spot where the fox was when viewed, though by doing so he would materially assist the pursuing host. It is the greatest nuisance to a huntsman when he gallops to a holloa with his pack to be told by the shouter that the fox has gone away over the hill in the vicinity of which hounds checked, for he has to hurry back again over, perhaps, an intricate bit of country when very likely his own cast would have hit off the line in less time than it had taken to get to the holloa.

At the vital period of a good hunt, when hounds have fairly asserted the superiority of condition and have worked near to their beaten fox, we should be more careful than at any other time how we raise our voices. All sportsmen have learned that the scent of a beaten fox is weak, but all do not realise how very weak it is when the quarry is run almost to a standstill and his elastic flight reduced to a shambling walk; but the hounds, though they cannot race up to him, are terribly excited and fully aware they are close to their beaten foe. A loud holloa now will likely as not madden and unsettle them. If they hunt from scent to view, well and good, but if the fox lies up in a fence, or lies down in a turnip or tillage field, the inveterate holloaers are very likely

to prolong if not to save his life. Hounds are baffled, the huntsman puzzled, and the units of the field are arriving on the scene more or less exhausted by the run, full of excitement, and all having plenty to say about it. Suddenly the fox is put on his legs and steals away down the drills or by the side of the fence. Then the outcry arises, "Tally-ho! Tally-ho! Yonder he goes!" &c., and, catching the contagion, every one yells. This brings the hounds—leaping wildly and bristling with excitement—not to the fox, but to the shouters. Reynard's last effort puts a fence between himself and the pack, and perhaps, as I saw happen two years ago, he reaches the drain for which he was making in the next field but one. Had intimation been quietly conveyed to the huntsman, and had the horsemen kept still and silent, Reynard would never have left the field alive.

Last year we saw hounds run their fox to the edge of a small half-frozen lake. Hounds went in after him, and the fox was soon after viewed scrambling up the shores of an islet in the middle of the lake. This sight had such an effect upon a noisy feather-headed whipper-in, that he let off a series of tally-ho's and screams; with the result that he brought all the hounds back to him. Meanwhile, unseen by us, the fox crossed the ice from the island to the mainland beyond and eventually made good his escape. Never was there such an example of the dangers of a holloa.

There is no doubt, however, that all sportsmen ought to try and learn to holloa in the orthodox manner; for,

of course, to every pack comes a time when, as Whyte-Melville sings :—

“With a storm in the air and the ground like a stone,
We’re all in a muddle, beat, baffled, and blown,”

and nothing more can apparently be done ; but, welcome sound ! a holloa is heard from afar. If it has the true ring about it, and sounds as if delivered by a practised voice, it will be the sweetest of sounds to the huntsman. “Huic holloa,” he shouts, and getting his pack together and his trumpet out, away he hustles, best pace, knowing he is on no fool’s errand. “That’s Gospel, begad !” roared the old West Country huntsman, with delight, who had lost his fox but heard the well-known holloa of Parson Froude.

A good holloa, clear and resonant, is pleasant to hear at any time, but music to our ears when the stirring gallop is checked all too soon and there seems but little chance of its revival. It is heard in England a good deal oftener than in the sister isle, for there a fox has many more enemies abroad, and in some populous districts is viewed by the countryfolk wherever he goes ; but, in the Green Isle, except in the neighbourhood of a covert, Reynard may travel for miles across the grass without once hearing the fateful sound, “Tally-ho !”

Now, concerning hound-language.

A very observant and enthusiastic student of the works of Mr. Surtees used to declare that the author ought to have given us more information as to the early career of his redoubtable hero, Mr. Soapey

Sponge, in order to account for the knowledge of the huntsman's art which that worthy possessed in such an eminent degree. "For," said my friend, "one would hardly imagine that a man whose principal residence appears to have been the Bantam Hotel, in Bond Street, and whose chief study was 'Moggs' cab fares,' would be able to take hold of a pack of fox-hounds and hunt them in a style worthy of the great Will Goodall himself."

Where did he learn to use the horn he took from Sir Harry Scattercash's huntsman, when he heard by the "hammering and pincering" of that individual's horse "that it was all U.P. with him?" And who taught him the dog-language he used so efficaciously in making his celebrated cast when the fair Lucy Glitters turned the pack to him?

"'Put 'em to me,' said Mr. Sponge, giving Miss Glitters his whip; 'put 'em to me!' said he, hallooing, 'Yor-geot, hounds!—Yor-geot!' which, being interpreted means 'here again, hounds!—here again!'"

"'Oh, the concited beggar,' exclaimed Mr. Watchorn to himself as, disappointed of his finish, he sat feeling his nose and mopping his face and watching the proceedings. 'Oh, the concited beggar!' repeated he, adding 'Old 'hogany bouts is *ab*-solutely goin' to kest them.'

"Cast them, however, he did, proceeding very cautiously in the direction the hounds seemed to lean. They were on a piece of cold scenting ground, across which they could hardly own the scent.

"'Don't hurry 'em,' cried Mr. Sponge to Miss Glitters, who was acting whipper-in with rather unnecessary vigour.

"As they got under the lee of the hedge, the scent improved a little, and from an occasional feathering stern a hound or two indulged in a whimper, until at last they fairly broke into a cry.

"'I'll lose a shoe,' said Watchorn to himself, looking first at the formidable leap before him, and then to see if there was any one coming

up behind. 'I'll lose a shoe,' said he. 'No notion of lippin' of a navigable river—a downright arm of the sea,' added he, getting off.

"'Forward, forward!'" screeched Mr. Sponge, capping the hounds on, when away they went, head up and sterns down, as before."

In this inimitable description Mr. Sponge certainly appears in the light of a huntsman possessed of judgment, experience, and *style*, so that I think my friend's criticism was justifiable. The dog-language is correct according to what has been traditionally handed down and written, and without stopping to inquire as to the antiquity or probable origin of this quaint language which huntsmen use, it is, I think, important that it should be preserved unaltered, and, like the sounding of the horn, which I have been discussing, its different phrases should be used by all huntsmen, instead of inventing, as some do, a phraseology of their own when speaking to or cheering their hounds.

It was in the middle of the last century that Mr. Tom Smith, Master at the time of the Pytchley Hounds, published in his *Diary of a Huntsman* a short vocabulary of language used by huntsmen, and though even Peter Beckford found it "as difficult to write a halloo as to pen a whisper," yet the terms as printed by Mr. Smith remain sufficiently intelligible when sounded, and have been so very often reprinted that they stand familiar to the ear as household words.

There is no doubt that Beckford is right though, and that the phonetic spelling of dog-language is difficult. I wrote on an earlier page of the conjugation of Greek verbs in connection with Mr. Robert Watson's encouragement to his hounds to find their fox; but, of course, that sound was simply a rendering of Mr.

Tom Smith's "Edawick, eadawick—try, try!" I once heard this term pronounced by a reader of the book with the accent on the last syllable, and he remarked that he "never in his life heard a huntsman sing out anything ending with 'wick.'" So here the phonetic spelling would appear to be wrong, and perhaps "Edoick" or "Eloick" comes a bit nearer the spelling of a very familiar sound. Mr. Sponge's "*Yor-geot*" is Surtees' spelling of what Mr. Smith prints "*Yo-geote*; when hounds have overrun the scent, or he wants them to come back to him."

But the cry has often come to my ears as if it were almost spelt "*Yeow-yeowte*." "*Yo-hote, yo-hote* there; to make hounds hunt at a check," has also been printed and sounded "*Yo-doit, yo-doit*," and is often abbreviated to "*Y'ut there, y'ut there*," which is as near as I can get to sounds that I have heard; while I recollect a professional huntsman whose encouragement was plainly "*Get there*," also usually naming a hound, as "*Get there, Riflemen—get there!*" which was often followed by "*Hey, that's it! that's it!*" It was unusual, and we thought it unworkman-like. But I do like to hear a hound cheered by name when he makes a hit, and I'll swear the hound loves it too.

The "*Yo-o-o-o-i there*" of some well-known huntsmen is most thrilling and enthralling, and the scream—sometimes printed "*Hoop*," but utterly impossible to spell, when the line is hit off after a check, is the most intensely pleasurable sound one hears when in chase.

"*Hoick holloa*" I know was used as a huntsman's

cheer in 1795, for I possess a print of my grandfather's so entitled, and bearing that date. It represents a very roomily-clad huntsman capping on his hounds, which are capitally drawn. He wears his hair long and rides a grey with a tremendous crest. "Howitt in. et f." is printed on the left corner of the margin. "Hoick holloa" still remains a pleasant sound when we are in difficulties, but it is one we seldom wish to hear.

"Elope forrard—to get hounds on." It is thus printed in Mr. Smith's book, but it seems to me that as a rule the initial E in the word is commonly discarded, and that I hear the whippers-in of my acquaintance cry, "Lope forrard, lope forrard," and "Lope lop, lope lop," when they bring on tail hounds, or something as near those sounds as I can represent by letters. "Yoi over" and "Try back," the latter word pronounced very broad, as it were "baick," let us say, are unalterable, as "Talli-ho," and—hateful sound!—"Talli-ho-back." It is not likely that any other cry will supersede "Who-whoop," which marks the proper finish of the chase; but if it be sounded over an open earth, huntsmen have different cheers of encouragement to excite their hounds to mark and satisfy themselves that their fox is there. One does like to see a fox well marked *where it is not imprudent for his safety to allow it to be done*; and to see hounds tearing up the earth, biting at the roots, and "making the sods fly," is no small compensation for the want of blood.

Beyond the hunting cheers and terms which have been mentioned and should be known by the veriest tyro, there are not many others about which we

who are not of the Hunt establishment need concern ourselves; and, like the sounds on the horn, the fewer words of command that hounds have to learn the better. Most huntsmen have some few pet words of their own, some "little language" to their favourites, which concerns us not; but the ordinary terms of the chase, as written by Tom Smith and other even older authorities, should, I think, be maintained, and unorthodox dog-language should not be suffered to creep into general use.

Whyte-Melville, in his ballad *The King of the Kennel*, which he dedicated to John Anstruther Thomson, was at great pains that the bit of dog-language with which he ended each stanza should be correct; and his correspondence with Anstruther Thomson on this subject is not the least amusing item in that famous fox-hunter's *Reminiscences*. I notice, by the way, that in the ballad Whyte-Melville prints a term we have been discussing in a manner of his own:—

"Yo-yooite, Bachelor!
Right for a crown!"

It is pleasing, then, I fancy, to all sportsmen to retain the old familiar sounds and usages of the chase and to vary them as little as possible. I have lately been plagued by an inability to understand what a hunt servant meant by the various war-whoops he uttered, and have suffered unnecessary palpitation several times a day through believing he was holloaing a fox away when he was only trying to get hounds out of covert. These strange, weird noises were baneful,

and have had, I suspect, the effect of producing these remarks. Who has not read of Mr. Richard Bragg, the swell huntsman in *Soapey Sponge*? Who has not laughed at him, yet loathed him? Surtees is, as usual, inimitable in his picture of that insufferable impostor. He introduces him thus with his hounds:—

“They were just gliding noiseless over the green sward, Mr. Bragg rising in his stirrups as spruce as a gamecock, with this thoroughbred bay gambolling and pawing with delight at the frolic of the hounds, some clustering round him, others shooting forward a little, as if to show how obediently they would return at his whistle. Mr. Bragg was known as the whistling huntsman, and was a great man for telegraphing and signalling with his arms, boasting he could make hounds so handy that they could do everything except pay the turnpike gates.” . . . “‘Yo-o-icks—wind him! Yo-o-icks—pash him up!’ cheered Bragg, cracking his whip and moving slowly on. He then varied the entertainment by whistling in a sharp, shrill key, something like the chirp of a sparrow-hawk.”

His fox breaks cover, then “Bragg’s queer tootle of his horn, *for he was full of strange blows*, now sounded at the low end of the covert”—and so the run began.

I remember a certain farmer huntsman who most decidedly was an undeniable sportsman, although his methods were strictly unorthodox. He would march round the outskirts of a covert with his pack—his hounds were said to be of old Irish breed—uttering a queer “burring” noise. If the hounds broke away and entered the gorse the fox was there, or had just left it; if they did not it was assumed that no fox was there, and the huntsman departed to draw elsewhere. But I proved to my own satisfaction one day, and to his great annoyance, that though the

hounds marched round the covert and left without drawing, Reynard was there right enough, for I viewed a fox crossing a ride just as Mr. F—— tootled his horn when moving off. He had great contempt for the recognised methods of fox-hunting, and particularly disliked any subsequent mention of the little incident I have related. At this period of the world's history it is surely unlikely that great discoveries will be made in what we call the noble science of fox-hunting, or that anything will be likely to cause a change in the old-time language that tradition has handed down for the use of huntsmen when addressing the pack, although new epithets and expletives may be bestowed occasionally on its followers. Let us, then, endeavour to preserve all the lore and traditions connected with the chase that have been bequeathed to us, and so—

“*Floreat scientia—esto perpetua.*”

CHAPTER VII

OUR PUPPIES: AN ENDLESS SOURCE OF INTEREST AND AMUSEMENT

MOST puppy-rearers, I fancy, taking a lasting interest in the animals they walk, and when good accounts are received from the kennels of the performances of their former charges the news is hailed with satisfaction, and a kind of reflected glory plays round the head of the puppy-walker. It was sad news, therefore, to hear one morning of the death of Carlow Pitiful, a bitch reared here that had proved herself about the best of the year's entry. Poor Pitiful! What an interest we took in her, wondering if that heavy forehand would ever fine to a symmetrical appearance, if that very crooked foreleg would ever become more like its fellow! Well, she grew, and the chest seemed to narrow as she grew, the neck to lengthen, the "neck-cloth" to drop off, and the shoulders to fall back; while, if not exactly straight, she did not stand so very much amiss after all when she went in from quarters. We had no companion for her in those days of extreme youth, for that year we did not receive our usual couple of whelps. She came alone, yet did not develop half the talent for

mischievous that a single puppy usually does, for we find that a couple of whelps manage to entertain each other so well at play that they are not so devoted to gardening and the uprooting and transplanting of shrubs, or to the removal of stable utensils and articles from the bleach-green as the single gentleman or lady for whom we provide temporary board and lodging.

It is better also, I am certain, for the puppies themselves, to rear a couple than a single dog. They exercise themselves twice as well, are never still, but always racing and chasing one another all over the grass, and very soon learn also to put their noses down and use them. I do not mean to say that our lamented Pitiful was immaculate, or free from the besetting sins of puppyhood, which cause such complaints from the gardeners and domestics. There was that affair of the *Ampelopsis Veitchii*, for instance, a creeper which is a great ornament to our south walls here we consider, but to which Pitiful had such a rooted objection that she several times endeavoured to uproot the plants. We placed a heavy garden seat in front of the principal stem, and when she again attacked the creeper she was tied to the seat, under which she had crept for protection, and beaten with many stripes; and it was long before she could be induced to visit that side of the house again.

We thought it best to send her into kennels a little earlier than we had intended, and the cause which led to this determination was rather curious. She had never betrayed the smallest inclination to chase or worry sheep, but when lambing season had

begun she marched up one morning to the hall-door with proudly waving stern and a very young lamb indeed held tenderly in her mouth. It was quite uninjured, but Pitiful was so highly pleased with herself that we thought it well that she should seek the restraining influence of the kennel lest she should develop a too decided penchant for mutton.

On looking over the old lists I find that poor Pitiful made up the number of puppies I have walked for this pack to exactly fifteen couples; and I have reared an odd one or two elsewhere. Without pretending to be able to remember the individual characteristics of each of these thirty foxhound puppies, I can truthfully say that the rearing of every one of them gave me interest and amusement, and that I was very loth to part with several of them.

A great companion of mine in the days of his puppyhood was little Racer, who always used to accompany me in my morning rides, and dearly loved a school across country with a young horse. Whelped in 1889, he was by Fitzwilliam Remus out of Bridget, who was by Brocklesby Roman out of Mr. Watson's Barmaid, a rare bitch. With such a pedigree, what could Racer be but a good one? And a good one he was! If he had only been on a bigger scale, here was our sire hound; but he wanted inches, and his lot was to run with the lady pack. He could run with them—aye, and lead them, too; and if the work was hard and the day long, he was showing them all the way in the evening. He wanted little entering, I fancy, for a fox covert was only three hundred yards from the place he was reared in, and one

spring morning, when I was told that the hounds were in the covert hunting hard, it proved to be Racer enjoying himself thoroughly, and letting all the world know he had found a fox. He went back to kennels that evening!

We had a great run with the Carlow and Island Hounds at the very end of the cubbing season of 1892, when, finding in Slocock's Gorse, hounds ran by Old Leighlin and Bornafea to within a few fields of Castlewarren, when they turned short and reached Kellymount Hill on the southern face of which they earthed their fox in a rabbit-hole among some furze bushes, after what Mr. Robert Watson termed, as I well remember "a glorious wild fox-hunt" of an hour and forty minutes. Horses, even in the very last days of October, are hardly in trim for such a run as that, but on Kellymount Hill the short grass rode firm and light, the small fences had gaps in each of them; and so a few of us were able to see how hounds strained up along the sides of the little banks, and twisted through the gaps after the dead-beaten fox, which was being constantly viewed, and first through every one of the gaps came little Racer, with his hackles erect. Poor Racer! He deserved a better fate than the poison which subsequently laid him low.

Foreman, even in puppyhood, was a hound of quite another type. A fine, upstanding dog, who was also most companionable with me, but of so quarrelsome a disposition that I seldom dared to take him outside the place. He was the terror of certain children who used to pass the stable-yard, taking a short cut to

school, and for a long time we suffered some inconvenience by his refusal to allow the postman to deliver the letters. It is fair to say that this trait in his character had its uses. No tramp ever thought it worth his while to repeat a visit after an interview with Foreman. One day I came up from the garden, hearing Foreman's voice raised in tones of unmistakable fury, and found him at the hall-door springing up at a side-car on which was seated a very voluble gentleman possessing a decidedly Jewish type of countenance. "Call hoff your offul tog," he cried; "I haf some beeyootifle Indian coots to show!" "But we don't want any, thanks!" I replied. "But I want to show to ze ladies in ze 'owse; let me joost get into ze 'owse." I requested him, however, to settle that point with Foreman, and he soon after departed in great wrath, I having retired chuckling in the comfortable certainty that Foreman would save me a dollar or two.

Shall I ever forget Rainbow and her devoted affection for the cook, who in turn grew fondly attached to her? Rainbow became a standing joke with us all; she grew so very like Leech's picture of Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's "Ponto," as depicted, showing "frantic delight," in the pages of *Soapey Sponge*. Out of all shape she grew, and was more like a prize pig than a puppy when she went back to Ballydarton; so that when I got a letter from the Master thanking me for "the beautiful bitch" I had reared, I fully thought he meant it in chaff. He could see her merits, though, even through the folds of fat; and when I went to look at the entry, I found great difficulty in recognising Rainbow. She turned out



AFFABLE AND AUDIBLE.
First Prize Clonmel Show.

(Earl Fitzwilliam's Coolattin Pack: by Wentworth Rustic from Anxious by Viscount Galway's Archer.)

well, too, and I believe was considered worthy of becoming a brood bitch. One never can tell what a puppy will grow into.

A pair of puppies that I had here a year or two ago found a fox in some furze behind the house I saw him break, and they came away pretty close to him, but never caught a view. Reynard went at first for all he was worth, and they hunted him splendidly, throwing their tongues like good 'uns, but taking an awful time to get over the fences. I followed as best I could, and found them at fault not far from a fox covert about two miles away. They were pretty well blown, but not half so pumped as I was, and I had no end of a job to get them home, for they always wanted to get back to where they lost their fox. Not a single day passed after that without the pair drawing steadily through those furze bushes for that fox, but I never heard of their finding again.

We have been lucky in the immunity our puppies have enjoyed from disease, and have had only one accident, but there was terrible grief on that occasion. The beautiful Stella was the constant attendant of two small children who made a great pet of her. As they had any amount of grass and fields to wander over inside the place, they were forbidden to take her out on the roads. But blackberries in a certain lane one day proved too much for them, and Stella followed across the high-road. It was fair day, and she was driven over, the wheel of the trap breaking her hip high up. She was but four and a half months old at the time, and the case looked hopeless; but one should never despair of any fracture in the days

of puppyhood, and she was quite sound when we sent her in the following March. That year Mr. Watson had the best bitch entry I have ever seen at Ballydarton, and third in order of merit good judges placed Stella, Mr. John Watson remarking that many people would have called her the pick of the lot. She proved also a first-rate bitch in her work, but I have mentioned her early career chiefly to show that we never should destroy a puppy on account of a fractured limb. Nature's cures are marvellous at that early age, and even if a complicated fracture should cause enlargement of a joint and prevent a well-bred hound from running up with a fast pack of foxhounds, he may prove useful in other fields of sport.

From my window, as I write, I can see a pair of lumbering foxhound puppies having a great game of romps round and round the croquet ground, and in and out of the shrubberies. They go head over heels in turn almost every time they race across the open, and I must say that I never had a pair of bitches that I liked less. Yet I can see daily improvement. Neither are straight yet. Rational is very nearly so now; Ransom was much the better at first, and apparently the bolder; but her sister has now quite turned the tables. There is not a fence in the country that Rational will not "have a go at" and get over or through after me, but Ransom is often left yelping behind. They are by Lord Fitzwilliam's Proctor, from a good little bitch named Ransom, and I feel sure will both turn out good working hounds, little as I like them at present. They are an endless source of interest and amusement, and their very

defects create attention because one watches the gradual improvement that is sure to come, with the greatest solicitude and hopefulness.

"Don't they kill all your poultry?" a lady asked the other day. But this pair have never even "looked crossways" at a fowl, as they say over here; and I explained how we cured even the formidable Foreman of being a chicken fancier. Having at a very early age displayed a penchant for young chickens, Foreman was introduced into a small yard where a hen of ample proportions sat surrounded by a goodly brood of chickens. No fox that ever was hunted had a worse time than that puppy, who then and there imbibed a horror of poultry that was to last him through life.

If a puppy takes to chasing sheep—and many puppies do when they see the stupid brutes flee from them whenever they come near—the remedy is easy. Couple the puppy to a heavy, well-grown sheep, possessed of a fine fleece, and a couple of hours of this partnership will eradicate any desire to approach the flock.

On the subject of puppy-walking, a well-known huntsman of great experience writes to me that he considers few puppies are rendered crooked by being allowed to go out on the roads and follow their guardian in his walks and rides, even at the early age of four or five months. He attributes crookedness in young hounds almost entirely to overfeeding when the whelps are very young, and supports his opinion by quoting many experiences in proof. My correspondent has done me the favour to write on

this interesting subject at some length; and there is so much that is valuable in these admirably written letters from one who has had between thirty and forty years' experience in the kennel that, though I have not permission to print them in full, I give some extracts that may be useful to puppy-walkers.

"Our puppies," he says, "are sent out to quarters when they are about seven weeks old, and I am always careful to impress on those who take them in that they should not feed them highly, and that they should give them plenty of liberty." He adds that when these instructions are carried out many of the puppies may be seen following a horse at three or four months old.

Much, of course, must depend upon the situation of the quarters, but personally I should feel chary of allowing my puppies to travel the high-road at such a tender age.

"The walkers are cautioned that until their charges arrive at that age it is not desirable to get them at all heavy in flesh (or top-heavy), but after that they cannot hurt them much, their limbs being better able to stand the weight.

I have proven that crookedness (or rickets) is brought on by too heavy feeding, puppies often being allowed to gorge themselves with kennel food, *i.e.*, oatmeal, flesh, and broth, mixed up very stiff, and they are often allowed to go to it when they feel inclined; consequently those with the best constitutions become top-heavy, the bone not being sufficient to carry the weight. Personally," writes my correspondent, "I feed the puppies at the kennels myself,

never leaving any food with them, and just keeping them in growing condition.

"I have sent out twenty-six couples of whelps up to date, not one of which has the least signs of crookedness at present. Many of them are to be seen now in the village, a mile or so from the kennels, having their full liberty and without any bad results. Some six seasons ago my kennelman was very anxious to push on the whelps, which he did by feeding them heavily several times a day. The consequence was that we had not one single straight-legged puppy out of the two litters so treated.

"Here is further proof. I sent out four puppies, by Belvoir Nailor out of a nice home-bred bitch, to a foster-mother, some eight or nine miles from here. I told the farmer when the puppies were three weeks old that he could help them along with some milk and scraps from the house. These puppies I fetched home when they were six weeks old.

"He had done them too well; they were top-heavy and crooked, and, *owing to having been kept on a straw-littered floor*, their feet are very open.

"For two days I gave them nothing but scalded milk, and an open field to run in, and unless you could see how straight they have become and how their feet have rounded up it would be difficult to believe it. I think they are now as straight as their brothers and sisters which I had just sent out."

The extracts which I have been permitted to make from these letters, I think, should be valuable to some in the "spring o' the year," when the whelps go out to quarters; but from personal experience I must still

maintain that, where it is possible to let the puppies have plenty of grass to ramble over, it is a mistake to take them far on the high-road till they are five months old, or nearly that age.

A pair of puppies whelped on January 29th were sent to me one year, after being walked for several months by a sportsman whose house was on the roadside, and who did the puppies a bit too well, perhaps, but certainly allowed them to follow his horse along the road at too early an age. They were so crooked that I begged to have them taken away; and not only were they crooked, but bony enlargements had formed about the knee-joints. They were transferred to a place inside the walls of the county town, where they were unable to get on the roads, but had lots of room to gambol about some large grass enclosures. The way that they improved was marvellous. They are not "plumb," certainly, but not very far from it.

They are curious animals, these foxhound puppies; very wise, yet also very foolish in their ways; and, oh, how difficult to breed so that some fault shall not be found! Many of these faults come to them when at walk, and crookedness is, no doubt, very often one of these.

The great "Squire's" Furrier was crooked, we are told; but as I have heard that his immediate descendants were *not*, this points to the probability that Furrier was not well walked—or, perhaps, was *too* well walked.

The puppies that I have known to be kept in too confined a place, though not always crooked, were invariably light of timber and not of powerful frame.

A very few days' confinement plays the very mischief with a growing puppy, and, sooner than shut one up because he chases a fowl, transplants a shrub, or digs a grave in the tennis court, I would send him back to kennels.

But for all these sins of puppyhood there is a remedy, and, of course, great watchfulness is required in order that bad habits may be checked at once. Would that one could say the same of their physical deficiencies! Why do some have open feet, and what can be done to improve them? Why should some be swine-chopped?—a defect for which there is, alas! no remedy. And then their accidents! What collie or terrier ever cuts his foot and gets “a toe down”? When did any other of the canine species break his stern or get his eye struck out by the stable cat?—an accident which I have twice known to happen. And their ailments! That distemper! Take that first! When are we going to get any reliable cure for that? When is the microbe going to be captured which shall point the way to immunity by inoculation? But why should distemper visit foxhounds ten times more severely than it does other sporting dogs? What anxiety the fell disease gives to us who walk a couple for the Master! But think of the anxiety of Master and huntsman, who have often twenty couples down with it at the same time!

And then the yellows! I have known a M.F.H. who very closely supervises everything connected with the kennel, to declare that he dreads the attacks of yellows more than he does distemper; and I know of one place in a neighbouring county where it is

impossible to rear a puppy of any description. Foxhound, collie, or terrier all fall victims to an incurable form of this disease. Yet I can safely say that I have never lost a single foxhound puppy from this cause, and have had no case of yellows here for the last twelve years; and this immunity I attribute to the use of scalded milk from the very first.

Most sportsmen who are members of a hunt profess to take an interest in the pack which they follow; in no way can they evince that interest so well as by walking a puppy—or, better still, a couple—for the Master. If they do, they will become aware of an added interest, and one which invests a visit to the kennels with a new pleasure. And surely all followers of a hunt who are in a position to do so should make a point of walking a puppy, instead of relying almost entirely on the farmers—so many of whom do not hunt—for assistance in this matter of keeping up their pack.

CHAPTER VIII

ON BLOODING HOUNDS

BEYOND all doubt the most satisfactory finish to a run with foxhounds is the death of the fox if run into fairly in the open.

When the anxious inquirers who have not participated in the day's sport receive the reply that "they pulled him down in the open," satisfaction is at once expressed, and the lucky ones who were in at the death seem hardly more elated than those to whom they tell the tale. The triumph is shared by all. It is often noticeable, too, that hounds on these occasions receive unstinted praise, which is by no means lavished upon them when they have run a dead-beaten fox to ground, or have lost him by some untoward accident, some cunning wile, or by the sudden failure of scent when victory seemed assured.

It is not very often in the course of a season that scent remains *first-rate* during the entire day, and in a wild country, inhabited by really stout foxes, the odds are decidedly in favour of the quarry. When Reynard runs into a populous neighbourhood, is viewed here and holloa'd there, and headed everywhere, he gets bothered and baffled, and falls an easier prey ;

but where he plods along unseen, nor followed by wondering sheep and curious cattle, a good deal of luck must be on the huntsman's side if he is to catch him.

No one who watches hounds carefully in their work can fail to notice how much that work is affected by a series of disappointments. With a good scent they will, of course, go fast, and drive along well. Really good hounds will always hunt well, and if there be a soft fox in front they will catch him in apparently good style, even if short of blood; but with a fair holding scent and an old Hector before them, I think most sportsmen who have hunted hounds are agreed that if short of blood they do not seem to press forward with such intensity as they do when they are getting a fox nearly every time they go out. Of course, Beckford's story is well known of the pack that did not kill a fox for three weeks, and then, after having had one fox dug out for them, polished off seven brace (I think it was) without a miss. It is not only in hot chase or at the end of the pursuit that most huntsmen declare they note the difference in the work of their hounds when they are getting plenty of blood, but they do their cold-hunting more quickly, and with an appearance of greater determination, which is also visible in drawing thick places, and when packing together on leaving covert.

To those who are fond of hound-work there is immense pleasure in seeing it done in good style, and the difference between a pack working along on the line of a fox in a perfunctory sort of manner and the same hounds maddening for his blood and driving

him before them in hot, concentrated fury, is really so remarkable that I have wondered it has not been oftener noticed in the profusion of hunting literature that is set before us at the present day.

The huntsman who is really fond of his work and fond of his hounds—as, to do them justice, most huntsmen are—will do all in his power to save his favourites from disappointment at the finish, and, when short of blood, the anxiety of that functionary towards the end of a run is almost pathetic. It is then that the murmuring of some extraordinary individuals that are to be found in every hunting-field will be pretty sure to make itself heard. If our huntsman displays an eagerness for the death of the fox he is termed bloodthirsty, and the unthinking and ignorant critics imagine that his anxiety is caused by a desire to run up a “big butcher’s bill” which will be trumpeted forth at the end of the season, be published even in the columns of the *Thunderer*, and so bring to him huge credit as a huntsman and a slayer of foxes. The fact is that few good huntsmen are thinking of themselves at all in the matter. They know perfectly well how every action of theirs is criticised, and being, as a rule, wise men, pay not the slightest heed to anything but the interests of their hounds, which, if the field only knew it, are, after all, their interest also.

What man is there who cannot criticise the huntsman and his work? A season and a half’s experience often converts the youthful beginner into an authority at the mess-table, club, or family circle on the whole business that some very clever men spend a considerable portion of their lifetimes in mastering. “This is

all wrong, you know," I heard a young gentleman explain at the beginning of the present season; "no one should ever dig a morning fox!" Whether this extraordinary maxim was hatched in his own callow brain or not I am unable to say, but shortly after on the same day, I heard it gravely repeated, and once with quite a serious air by a lady.

I have searched my *Thoughts on Hunting*, by one Peter Beckford, for a confirmation of this opinion without success, nor can I find anything to that effect in Somerville's *The Chase*, though these two works contain, I think, all the information that most men require on the subject of hunting; indeed, a friend of mine is wont to declare that no man should pass an opinion on hunting subjects who cannot pass an examination on Beckford.

But this matter of the digging brings me back to my subject—the necessity for blood and the means of obtaining it; and for the present at least let us put on one side all silly criticisms and sentimental twaddle. I have inquired lately from a good many efficient huntsmen and masters of hounds their opinions as to the necessary for blooding hounds, and the amount of blood that they require to keep them really up to concert pitch; and it seems to be agreed that each pack ought to have at least one fox a week to produce the desired results.

So very few of those who go out hunting in these days take the slightest atom of interest in hounds, that no wonder one hears strange things said in the hunting-field; but it is a great pity that this should be so, and the folk that are to be pitied are the

people whose carelessness about hounds has caused them to remain ignorant of many most interesting traits in the character of that highly-bred animal, the modern foxhound.

Many of those who go out hunting are content to notice in a casual manner the clustering hounds waiting with waving sterns at the meet for their huntsman's arrival, and perhaps deem it an interesting and pretty sight to watch their greeting with its clamorous rush ; but few have any idea of the depth of character, powers of memory, and peculiar intelligence of the foxhound, who nevertheless seems, in some respects, a strangely dull and unobservant animal that cannot compare with the collie or terrier in cleverness ; yet in others he seems to display more brain-power than the rest of the canine tribe, as one may gather when listening to old stories by huntsmen of their best-loved hounds.

One of the traits of the character of the foxhound is his extreme sensitiveness, which causes him to be subject to fits of deep dejection, to sulk in an extraordinary manner ; and, objectionable as this very common habit may be, it will be found that the animal seldom gives way to it without reason. Foxhounds, although they will work like demons, are not only impatient when disappointed in getting hold of a fox that they have run to ground, and show dislike to leaving the place where they have marked him, but if the disappointment is repeated a few times, begin to show a want of keenness about every detail of the chase. They become slack, in fact, and this displays itself not only in drawing but in casting. I

wonder what remedy for this state of things would be suggested by the critics who are always ready to blame a huntsman who digs a fox for his hounds?—this being, I have also remarked, considered to be a crime unpardonable if done on a good scenting day; for the sufficient reason, of course, that the critic conceives that the time employed might be better occupied in looking for another fox to give him a gallop, the needs of the hounds receiving no thought or consideration whatever.

Yet were I huntsman of a pack of hounds that was short of blood, the good-scenting day is the one that I would select to blood my hounds by the use of the spade or terrier, for on such a day even slack hounds become keener; they will mark their fox with energy and determination, and if they get hold of him when in this mood, should break him up savagely, when probably a cure will be then and there effected.

It can be truly said that on everything connected with the chase Beckford's opinions remain as invaluable at the present day as they were when first given to the public; for, although the great Peter hunted in the Stour Valley and on Cranbourne Chase one hundred and thirty years ago, so much in the system that he recommends must be accepted as unquestionably correct, that we must conclude the author was a sportsman considerably in advance of his age. For instance, he is all for "style" in fox-hunting. "Most fox-hunters," he says in the fifteenth letter, "wish to see their hounds run in good style. I confess I am myself one of these. I hate to see a string of them, nor can I bear to see them creep where they can

leap. It is the dash of the foxhound which distinguishes him, as truly as the motto of William of Wickham distinguishes us. A pack of harriers, *if they have time*, may kill a fox; but I defy them to kill him in the style in which a fox ought to be killed."

In my edition of *Thoughts on Hunting*, on the page opposite to that on which these words are printed, is a picture of two couple of Beckford's hounds, and I think they look very like catching any fox and doing it in good style, too. Here are straight legs, round feet, rare shoulders, deep chests, round ribs, strong loins, and good quarters and thighs. The colour, to be sure, would be too light for the taste of the present day, but nothing of the heavy-jowled, crooked-legged old Southern type is to be seen.

"Although," writes Beckford, "I am a great advocate for style in the killing of a fox, I never forgive a professional skirter," and yet so important did he deem plenty of blood to be to produce this excellence of style that he declares in his opinion when blood is wanted the huntsman should take "every advantage that he can of the fox." "You will think," he said, "that he may sometimes spoil his own sport by this; it is true he sometimes does, but then he *makes* his hounds, *the* whole art of foxhunting being to keep the hounds well in blood"; and immediately afterwards he presses this point still more strongly when he says, "I confess that I esteem blood so necessary to a pack of foxhounds that with regard to myself I always return better pleased with but an indifferent chase with death at the end of it than with the best chase possible if it end with the loss of the fox." This may seem an

exaggerated way of putting the case, but Beckford writes entirely from the view of the houndsman, and in no part of his work, not even in his immortal description of a fox-hunt, does he descant upon the pleasures of riding as they appear to him, though in the beginning of his seventeenth letter he reads us a lecture which, though it has been often quoted, will stand repetition. "Fox-hunting, an acquaintance of mine says, is only to be favoured because you can ride hard and do less harm in that than any other kind of hunting. There may be some truth in the observation; but to such as love the riding part only of hunting, would not a trail-scent be more suitable? Gentlemen who hunt for the sake of a ride, who are indifferent about the hounds, and know little of the business, if they do no harm, fulfil as much as we have reason to expect from them, whilst those of a contrary disposition do good, and have much greater pleasure. Such as are acquainted with hounds and can at times assist them, find the sport more interesting, and frequently have the satisfaction to think that they themselves contribute to the success of the day."

So that even in Beckford's day there were "such as love the riding part only of hunting," and were "indifferent about the hounds." The gentlemen of this kidney who hunted with the great Peter, I fear, must have viewed with as much impatience as we see manifested nowadays his very decided determination that his hounds should have plenty of blood.

"You desire to know," he writes in the twenty-second letter, "what I call *being out of blood*? In answer to which I must tell you that, in my judgment,

no foxhound can fail of killing more than three or four times following without being visibly the worse for it. When hounds are out of blood there is a kind of evil genius attending all they do; and, though they may seem to hunt as well as ever, they do not get forward; while a pack of foxhounds well in blood, like troops flushed with conquest, are not easily withstood. What we call *ill-luck*, day after day when hounds kill no foxes, may frequently, I think, be traced to another cause, namely, *their being out of blood*; nor can there be any other reason assigned why hounds which we know to be good should remain so long as they sometimes do without killing a fox. Large packs are the least subject to this inconvenience; hounds who are quite fresh and in high spirits least feel the want of blood."

Beckford then deals with the remedy for "slackness," which is invariably consequent on want of blood. "If your hounds be much out of blood, give them rest. . . . If what I have now recommended should not succeed, if a little rest and a fine morning do not put your hounds into blood again, I know of nothing else that will. After a tolerably good run do not try to find another fox. Should you be long in finding, and should you not have success afterwards, it will hurt your hounds; should you try a long time and not find, that also will make them slack; and nothing surely is more contrary to the true spirit of fox-hunting, for foxhounds, I have already said, ought always to be above their work. . . . When hounds are much out of blood some men proceed in a method that must necessarily keep them so.

They hunt them every day, as if tiring them out were a means to give them strength and spirit. When hounds are in want of blood, *give them every advantage*. Go out early, choose a good quiet morning, and throw off your hounds where they are likely to find, and are least likely to change; if it be a small covert or furze brake and you can keep the fox in, it is right to do it, *for the sooner you kill him when in want of blood the better for your hounds*. *All kinds of mobbing is allowable when hounds are out of blood*, and you may keep the fox in covert or let him out as you think the hounds will manage him best."

In the same letter Beckford gives instructions for the digging of foxes in snow-time and reiterates his opinion as to the absolute necessity for giving hounds plenty of blood, but slyly adds, "But I seem to have forgotten a new doctrine which I lately heard—that blood is not necessary to a pack of foxhounds. If *you* also should have taken up that opinion I have only to wish that the goodness of your hounds may prevent you from changing it, or from knowing how far it may be erroneous. Those who can suppose the killing of a fox to be of no service to a pack of foxhounds, may suppose, perhaps, that it does them hurt; it is going but one step further."

Those who have not studied Beckford's work may imagine from these extracts that he was a blood-thirsty sportsman who desired to show a long list of foxes killed, but no idea could be more fallacious. He writes most strongly against the unnecessary killing of foxes, and no one has ever put the matter more strongly or in abler fashion; but before quoting



Photo]

[Lafayette, Dublin.

MR. WILLIAM DE SALIS FILGATE.

Master of the Co. Louth Foxhounds since 1860.

his words I must call to mind his opinion that three or four succeeding days without a kill renders fox-hounds visibly the worse for it. "Though," he writes, "I am so great an advocate for blood as to judge it necessary to a pack of hounds, yet I by no means approve of it so far as it is sometimes carried. I have known three young foxes chopped in a furze brake in one day without any sport—a wanton destruction of foxes, scarcely answering the purpose of blood, since that blood does the hounds most good which is most dearly earned. Such sportsmen richly deserve blank days, and, without doubt, they often meet with them. Mobbing a fox, indeed, is only allowable when hounds are not likely to be a match for him without it. Are not the foxes' heads which are so pompously exposed to view often prejudicial to sport in fox-hunting? How many foxes are wantonly destroyed, without the least service to the hounds or sport to the Master that the huntsman may say he has killed so many brace? How many are digged out and killed, when blood is not wanted, for no better reason?—foxes that another day perhaps, the earth's well stopped, might have run hours and died gallantly at last?"

These passages, I think, do most conclusively prove that Beckford cannot be charged with inhumanity, and that therefore his strong advocacy of the necessity of blood for hounds—if we are to expect them to show us really good sport—is entitled to the strongest respect, and should command our belief when we know that he was a past-master of the art of hunting, and that all else that he wrote has been considered

valuable by the greatest sportsmen that have flourished since his day. If Mr. Otho Paget's idea, that no one should be allowed to take the field until they have read and digested Beckford, could be carried out, we should hear little of the "grouching" that often takes place when the M.F.H. decides to "have him out"; or when he deems it advisable to make it a short day, and so take hounds home "above their work," as Beckford says. What is done, is done in nine cases out of ten, for the sake of the hounds, and in the interests of future sport, and of these interests none can judge so well as the Master and huntsmen. There are in every hunting-field some queer spirits who only seem happy when finding fault with the management, and whom nothing can please; these you may lay long odds are neither generous in their subscriptions to the Hunt, nor do they trouble themselves to assist very much in looking after the coverts or the country; they can all study Beckford, however, whose support has been called for so often in this paper to uphold the axiom that every pack ought to have at least one fox per week to keep it up to the proper standard of excellence.

It is wearisome work, very often, digging for a fox, and I don't think anybody likes it; but I fancy it is very seldom practised too often, although there have been well-known eccentric individuals who become notorious for the abuse of the spade.

CHAPTER IX

THE COLOUR OF HOUNDS: THOSE HELPFUL SPLASHES OF WHITE

THAT "a good horse can't be a bad colour" is an old saying, though it brought John Leech's favourite hero, Mr. Briggs, to grief, being an inducement for him to purchase his famous spotted hunter, who, having been highly trained in a circus, insisted on sitting down on his haunches whenever a band played. Well, we all, I fancy, have our favourite colour for our horses as well as for bright eyes and silken tresses.

In spite of the legendary romance that lingers about a black, neither hunting men nor men of the Turf are usually fond of the "coal-black steed," though, personally, I have had several very good hunters that were blacks; and I suppose our favouritisms in colour are the result of pleasant recollections of the doughty deeds of some bright particular stars, either "chestnut or brown, or the flea-bitten grey." This, one would think, can be the only reason for a sportsman preferring to buy a horse of one particular colour, though no doubt an objection to appear conspicuous or *outré* might deter many from the purchase of a skewbald or

a steed spotted like Mr. Briggs' favourite, no matter how good a performer he was known to be.

As to the *utility* of particular colours in hunters, the reason that makes the modern military man discard the grey as a charger is an argument, to my mind, in favour of his use as a hunter—he can be seen such a long way off. I recollect some years ago having a capital run over a very wild and intricate country on a very foggy day in Ireland, where, as a rule, we are very little troubled by fog in the hunting season. We went away from a covert on to a high table-land in the Queen's County, where the mist lay thick; the late kennel-huntsman of the Duhallow carried the horn, and he was mounted on a marvellous old grey mare that I never saw down at a fence. Getting away, as usual, with his hounds, he crossed the first road well in advance of us all. Being foggy, it was a bad hearing day; but some of us saw a ghostly white shadow flitting on in front, and whenever it disappeared we knew there was a fence. A brown or a chestnut would have been invisible, but the fleeting white shape guided us, and we heard the music at last, and stayed in hearing of it to the end—stayed till the music became loud and uproarious and we found the pack baying round an earth. Then said a friend to me, “A law should be passed compelling all huntsmen to ride white horses.”

So it would appear that for one colour at least utility may be claimed in the hunting-field, so far as horses are concerned.

Can the same be said of hounds? Well, to a certain

extent, I think it can. It is not often that a pure white foxhound is bred (though I saw a puppy, and a very well-made one too, of that colour last year) and it is not often perhaps that a hound whose colour is almost white, is a very good one; but I can swear that in my experience the most wonderful working hounds that I have seen have had plenty of white about them, and these are very much the easiest to see when in chase. I have in my possession a good many portraits of celebrated hounds of a past day, and I have looked with interest at the pictures of a good many more. With hardly an exception they are light-coloured hounds, or hounds that have a good deal of white about them.

Glancing back to early days of fox-hunting in the eighteenth century, I have before me an engraving from Stubbs' picture of the black, tan and white Brocklesby Ringwood, 1788. Stubbs' hounds are full of intelligence, but he did not always make them great beauties. Ringwood is a very deep hound, standing on short, almost stumpy forelegs that have great bone and carry rare feet. Then there is Colonel Thornton's famous Merkin and her puppies. She is black and white with some tan about the head and a blue mottle merging with the white. Merkin ran an attested trial of four miles in seven minutes and half a second (there were no chronographs, I think, in those days). She was sold in 1795 for four hogsheads of claret, the seller to have two couples of her whelps.

There is plenty of white, too, about Brocklesby Rallywood (1843), as painted by Ferneley, before he went to Belvoir in 1850 in exchange for Rutland to be the

very marrow of the famous ducal pack. His white shoulders and nape of neck, breast, and forelegs are very noticeable in the picture, and Will Goodall's memorandum will suffice for further description : "This is a most beautiful little short-legged dog, exceedingly light of bone, but with beautiful legs and feet." "Cecil," who saw his son Rallywood at *eleven years old*, thus describes him : "His colour is a very rich black, white and tan ; his symmetry is most captivating and perfect. With a splendid intelligent head, well set on a nice clean neck, good shoulders, legs straight as arrows, rare feet, fine back and loins with capital thighs, and rather under than over twenty-three inches in height, he is, in my estimation, as near as possible the perfection of a foxhound."

My sketch of perhaps the greatest of all sires, Osbaldeston's Furrier, represents him as a black and white hound (a very great deal of white about him), of rather a short-backed type, extraordinarily deep through his heart, and with a very high-set stern. It is a broadside view, so the crookedness which expelled him from Belvoir in 1821 is concealed in the picture. That year "The Squire" wanted more hounds for five days a week with the Quorn, and went to Belvoir for the draft he had secured ; and, writes "Cecil," "Jervis, the feeder, who was an excellent judge, pointed out Furrier, saying he was the best bred hound in the kennel, and descended from Mr. Meynell's Stormer, 'but I don't think his Grace will keep him.' 'Why not?' said the Squire, 'he's the finest-looking hound of the lot.' 'Yes,' replied the feeder, 'but his legs are not quite straight, and

the Duke won't like him.' This turned out to be true, so Furrier was consigned to Quorn"; and when Osbaldeston took his pack to the Pytchley country in 1829 he had no fewer than twenty-four and a half couples in it by him, and oftentimes he made his whole draft for the day from the progeny of this renowned sire. Furrier ended his days at Brocklesby, having been presented by the Squire to Lord Yarborough, and the last of his family was one litter at Brocklesby.

My picture of Mr. Corbet's great Warwickshire Trojan represents a terribly throaty, short-necked hound with very faulty shoulders, which, like his neck and the rest of his forehand, are white. He does not look like being the only hound out of a strong pack who could jump the park wall at Chillington, and at "Lord Dartmouth's, near Birmingham." The grey-pied Tarquin, another Warwickshire celebrity, was an ancestor of the hound that "could do no wrong," the blue-pied Berkeley Cromwell, whose head now hangs in the hall at Berkeley Castle—"the best hound," said old Harry Ayris, "that ever man cheered." Cromwell was got by Lord Henry Bentinck's renowned Contest, whose colour was, according to Cecil, "a good black, white, and tan" ("Hunting Tours," p. 89).

Cromwell's blood ran strong in a very great hound of later date whose portrait is now before me. This is Lord Coventry's Rambler (1873), who must always rank as one of the sires of the age. My likeness is an engraving, and shows a lovely, lengthy black, white and tan hound, with absolutely everything

right about him, just the sort one would imagine to run hard, as he did in his *ninth* year. He was by Lord Fitzhardinge's Collier, a descendant of Cromwell. When I was at the Berkeley kennels some years ago light colours still predominated, as they did in the time of Harry Ayris, when the Earl was not particular as to looks or colour, coarseness or straightness, so long as the nose was right and the work good, and they were not shy of tongue. The best-looking hound in the world, if he had not these qualifications, was put away at once. "Lord Fitzhardinge's hounds kill more foxes and work harder than any pack in the kingdom," said an authority of that day.

In the neighbouring kennel at Badminton a large number of badger and yellow-pied hounds have always been observable, due largely to the blood of the celebrated Beaufort Justice (1813), a yellow-pied hound by the New Forest Justice. In Ferneley's picture, "The Meet at Grove in 1828," there is not a single dark-coloured hound. Mr. G. Saville Foljambe, probably the best hound breeder of them all, was the Master, and Lord Galway and Lord Henry Bentinck are prominent in the picture, looking approvingly at the pack that afterwards was to fetch 3,500 guineas at the hammer.

I think absolutely the best foxhound I ever saw at work was a black and white spotted hound, with no tan about him at all. I first saw him on the flags as a puppy, and heard the great sportsman who bred him say, "I suppose I ought to draft him on account of his beastly pointer colour—but, look at his shapes!" Warrior was not drafted, I am glad to

say, but transmitted his splendid working qualities to many descendants, and also, I am bound to admit, his exact colour to a good many that I have seen. He was a grandly shaped hound, and when one huntsman of a neighbouring pack caught sight of him and heard of his work, he never rested till he had sent some of his best bitches to him, and excellent results followed. No one, I think, likes the look of a tanless black and white hound; but Peter Beckford remarks that "a good hound, like a horse, can't be a bad colour." Still it appears to me that light colours are preferable to dark in the field. Some folk have ideas that the badger and hare pies are "soft," that a predominance of white tells a tale of constitutional weakness, but I think the great hounds above mentioned show that this is not the case.

At the present time dark-coloured hounds with very little white about them appear to be most fashionable, and if of almost whole tan colour, they are most admired of all, judging from remarks I hear, particularly at hound shows; but I am heterodox enough to believe that as a colour "the beautiful Belvoir tan" is the least to be desired when hounds are in chase. We are not all able to ride close to hounds when the heyday of youth is passed, and, indeed, the majority of the field must usually be content to view the pack from some little distance when they are running hard. Now in heather, over ploughed land, or in rough, bracken-covered fields, their fashionable colour is almost invisible, but a pack of dappled hounds one can see a mile away.

They look better, too, to my mind as they sweep across the greensward in a compact mass of varied colour :—

“Chime, ye dappled darlings,
Through sleet and snow,
Who can override you?
Let the horses go!

“Chime, ye dappled darlings,
Down the roaring blast,
You shall see a fox die
Ere an hour be past.”

Those who have ridden in sight of hounds for any length of time with the country as heavy as it is now well know how difficult to follow with the eye they become when the continued pace has put the horses on their mettle to live with them, and the stain from ploughed land and muddy ditches has obliterated all white from the colour of the gallant pack and reduced them to one uniform dark drab.

When I first saw the Belvoir hounds on the flags I was fairly amazed with the beauty and uniformity of that most magnificent-looking pack, but two days later when I saw them at work on the ploughs I felt less in love with the “typical colour” of some of them. I have seen the great Dexter, and have read a great deal about him, but still am heathen enough to declare that I should like him better with some real good splashes of white about his sides.

A few years ago when hunting with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds I noted often how difficult it was to follow the dark tan hounds with the eye, but how the dappled ones were fairly thrown up by

the heather in bold relief. I reared one hound which had been drafted to those regions on account of his great size; he was a dark-coloured hound, and, though I took great interest in his proceedings, he was very difficult to distinguish, and, alas! when found, he was by no means "running at head." Two years ago a well-known and enthusiastic young amateur huntsman excited great surprise by making public his endeavour to get together a pack of "badger or hare-pied hounds or those of a light colour." He knew what he was about, however, and was going to hunt a rough country, and, as I dislike wearing glasses out of doors, my entire sympathy was with him in his endeavour. I hunted a good deal not very long ago with a pack in which the fashionable dark colours predominated; I fear they were not a very first-class pack, but in a certain part of the country I found it so hard to see them that I fairly loved the little spotted lady who led them such a dance among the heather and bracken and low Irish furze; out of gratitude to her, perhaps, I have penned the above.

CHAPTER X

THE FOX IN SUMMER

“Stags in the forests lie, hares in the valley oh,
Web-footed otters are speared in the lochs
Beasts of the chase that are not worth a tally-ho!
None can compare with the gorse covert fox.”

Now is the season of respite, at length has arrived the time of peace and goodwill to the vulpine race. No more for many months shall disappointment in the shape of locked hall-door await the rambling fox at his earth after a nightly prowl. No more shall the deep note of some well-known “finder” arouse Sir Reynard from dreams of hen-roosts and plunder, and strike terror to his guilty soul.

Nunc est ludendum, the time of domestic quietude, of endless frolic with the precocious youngsters of the fox family, of havoc among young birds, bunnies, and field-mice.

The majority of the throng in scarlet or sable, whose chief recreation for five months of the year is the pursuit of the fox, will probably never again set eyes on a single specimen of the race till the first week of next November, and what becomes of

poor Reynard in the meantime is a matter of which they are profoundly ignorant and which appears to concern them not at all.

Fortunately for the fox—fortunately for the noble sport—there are sportsmen in every country who are of a different kidney to the above. These are the residents; the poor country mice, whose quiet homes, “embowered by trees and hardly known to fame,” are situated among the green pastures across which we ride with such rapture in the winter, and upon these men devolves in great measure the care and protection of the fox haunts and the inhabitants thereof during the off season. In his morning or evening ramble the country sportsman, an he be a true man, will note the weak place in the covert fence and see that it be repaired against trespass. To him will be brought early news of the litters in his neighbourhood, which he will protect with a fatherly care, and whose progress, education, and amusements will afford him much interest and pleasant recreation.

Although an amnesty has been now proclaimed between the foxhound and his hereditary foe, poor Reynard has other and more deadly enemies to contend against, and from whom he requires protection. He has an evil reputation, and that lying jade Rumour has made it a thousand times worse than it ought to be.

“The fox took my lambs last night,” said a wrathful agriculturist not long ago.

“How do you know it was the fox?” I mildly inquired.

“Didn’t I see the blood on the ground, and find the lambs themselves lying in a ditch, half eaten?”

“But couldn’t a dog have done that?” I suggested.

“I know the fox did it. Don’t I hear him barking every night?” was the reply.

In vain I argued that it is not the practice of the fox to bark when in pursuit of his prey—that, on the contrary, he is a silent hunter; that his bark is a serenade to his lady-love, a call to a comrade, or a warning to his cubs. Words were useless, pleading ineffectual—and the poison was prepared. The utmost favour I could gain was that the strychnine should be, for the first night, placed in some porridge and not in meat. The result was that within two hundred yards of where the poison was laid were found the corpses of three dogs—one a highly-prized setter of the lamb-owner—two cats, several crows and magpies, and a missel-thrush. Alas! on the following day, in the adjoining field, was found a fine dog fox, cold and stiff, and almost in his paws the body of a crow. Poor Reynard had apparently never entered the lambing field at all—he was found a quarter of a mile away from the porridge; but dogs, cats, and birds had all partaken of the deadly mess.

I by no means wish to assert that foxes never take lambs, but I believe they do so very rarely, considering the ease with which they could seize numbers of them in the lambing season if they wished. I have asked many shepherds who have been sitting up with the lambs if they ever saw a fox seize a lamb, and never could get a reply in the affirmative. From the window which is in front of me as I write, I look



Photo]

MR. ASSHETON BIDDULPH.
Master of the King's County Hounds.

[Elliot & Fry.

out over green pastures grazed by many sheep. My lawn is divided from these pastures by a sunk fence, and by the side of this sunk fence is a favourite "run" of Reynard in his rambles from the adjacent gorse.

Often and often have I seen him appear, attended by fluttering magpies, and, nose to ground, hunt slowly, like a setter, through the pastures. The sheep when he is near wheel away, and, with heads erect, follow him at a respectful distance, but betray no more alarm than they do when *lepus timidus* wanders shyly into the field and limps and squats alternately, as is his custom of an afternoon. Evidently the fox is considered no mortal foe by the flock; but mark the hurried flight, the awful panic caused by the sight of the most harmless of lap dogs, even though he be on my side of the sunk fence. Ewes and lambs are off in a mad stampede, terror is betrayed in every motion, they squeeze in a huddled mass through a gap in the fence beyond and are lost to view. They know too well the canine fondness for mutton.

Nevertheless, it is certain that a weakly and newly dropped lamb is now and then carried off by a fox when the vixen has maternal cares on hand; for when the cubs are very young the forays on farm-yard and hen-roost are most frequent. It is at this season, then, that the country sportsman can do much to lessen those "bills of mortality" which assume such terrible proportions when they are presented to poor M.F.H. A stroll with the gun in the evening and morning in the neighbourhood of the covert will

most likely provide a brace of bunnies—and what sportsman will grudge them?—a rook or two, or a wood pigeon, and so save the farmer his fowls and the master his silver. Now also is the short-lived season for the rook rifle, and the tender “branchers” are wonderfully relished by the fox; but most of all does he delight in a succulent water-hen.

Last winter, in the snow-time, I sallied forth when daylight permitted, and from the covert fence I tracked a fox's wanderings for many a mile. He led me to every pond in the parish, and as every piece of water was frozen over I wondered not a little at first. However, the tracks of water-hens soon revealed the object of his quest, and at last I came to a pond where there had been a rush and a capture on the ice, as testified by the marks of the struggle and drops of blood on the snow.

Satisfied with his bag, the fox had then returned home well pleased, for I pricked him back to the covert and marked the depression in the snow caused by the bird he was carrying. And on his homeward journey he must have worn his brush in a jaunty fashion, for I never saw the mark of it in the snow, though I frequently noted he had been trailing it on his outward prowl. But it is not the “gorse-covert fox” who is the real desperado, the robber of the finest turkeys, the slaughterer of hecatombs of geese. The great culprit is the outlyer, the solitary brigand whose lair is on some straggling double fence, gorse-covered bank, or small, sequestered brake too insignificant to be regularly drawn. This retreat when discovered will generally disclose the desperate character

of the outlaw, for the heaps of feathers and bones and the heads of hapless ducks found there far exceed the contents of the fox's larder in the covert. "Rats and mice, and such small deer," young rabbits, beetles, frogs, and snails form the usual *menu* of the "gorse-covert fox," varied by occasional tribute from a farmyard, *but seldom from a neighbouring one*. Experience tells me that a fox very rarely indeed takes fowls or ducks from the vicinity of the covert he frequents, but, probably wishing to be at peace with his neighbours, travels far afield for his poultry.

I think that a fox does not manage to kill many full-grown rabbits in the course of a year, but he seldom fails to capture at least one young one in a summer's evening; many an hour have I wiled away right pleasantly in watching the grace, activity, and amazing swiftness of this "last of our wild beasts" when in pursuit of the nimble coney.

A few years ago there were two litters of cubs in a gorse covert in my immediate neighbourhood, and a portion of the field adjoining the covert had been ploughed up; this ploughed land formed a playground and hunting-field for the cubs, and here I often watched them receive their early lessons in rabbit-catching from the vixen. About six in the evening I used regularly to take up my position at a corner of the covert, and seldom had many minutes to wait before the cubs appeared in the open.

When the sun was dropping low, and the stillness of evening replaced that indescribable hum and bustle which pervades the world during daylight even in the sleepest of sleepy hollows, I would move as

silently as possible by the fox covert till I reached the corner and could command a view of the ploughed land.

The bullocks grazing in the field, with the curiosity of their species, would advance upon me slowly, but, finding that I remained absolutely motionless, invariably continued their ruminations close around me, and often formed a living screen from behind which I could observe, without fear of detection, the manœuvres of the foxes.

In the quiet twilight, while the cattle beside me cropped close the green herbage, and the scent of their breath gave an added sweetness to the evening air, the rabbits hopped and squatted and played wild games of romps in the fallows outside the gorse bushes; and in the silence one could hear the patter of their paws on the ground. But the most sensitive ear could catch no sound of footfall when a cub appeared in the open as suddenly as if he had been shot up from below. Shortly the whole litter of four half-grown cubs would be seen, but of these and their gambols the bunnies took scant notice; nor did the cubs appear much disposed to be aggressive till the vixen came upon the scene. Then all was changed: such bunnies as did not bolt at once into the depths of the gorse squatted flat in terror, while the cubs crowded round their parent with every demonstration of joy. Then a curious sight could be witnessed. As deliberately as a keeper places his guns outside a pheasant covert, so did the vixen post her cubs at intervals along the outside of the gorse, and then proceeded to hunt the bit of ploughed land,

which I should mention had been sown with gorse seed as an addition to the covert. Soon she would put up a squatting rabbit, who darted for his life towards the gorse with Mrs. Vixen in hot pursuit, while the cubs did their best to cut off poor bunny's retreat. I never witnessed a capture effected in this manner, though I have no doubt the manœuvre was at times successful, for the "shaves" were often very close indeed. On one occasion a rabbit bolted the other way, and faced for the open; and never have I seen any animal rival the incredible swiftness of that vixen's rush. Ere twenty yards had been covered she was upon him, and one loud squeak told of the closing of long jaws on the loins of the victim.

Foxes prowl in company far more frequently than is generally supposed, and hounds have, I fancy, a brace in front of them much oftener than we who ride to them at all suspect. Not once, but many times have I seen three foxes issue from the neighbouring covert "'twixt the gloaming and the mirk" of a summer's evening, and, like Indians on the war-path, move stealthily in single file across the flat fields towards the rough hillside; often, on a dewy morning in June, when riding a colt before the sun had risen high, I have viewed a brace returning together, and sometimes both were laden with the spoils of foray. When the young corn is getting high and the meadows ready for the mower, foxes are rarely seen save by those whose pleasure or duty it is to be abroad early when the mist still lies on the lowlands and the dew is glittering on the

grass; when a solemn hush is over the land after the burst of melody which greets the dawn from grove and coppice, and when even that natural ventriloquist, the corncrake, who has been "scraping" incessantly through the night, has ceased his monotonous cry.

Then is the time to steal down to the covert, and while that glorious glow is still in the East, maybe you shall behold the triumph of *Reineke Fuchs*. Here he comes, stepping daintily through the wet grass, and trailing, like Achilles, his slain—the good, grey goose held by the neck in his mouth, her body swung across his shoulders, and her drooping pinions brushing the dew; or perchance Dame Partlet is between his bloody jaws, her breast feathers dropping at every step—a rueful spectacle.

Have no fears, however, for your own fowl-house or farmyard, if they be close to the covert. Yonder victims have been "lifted" from a far country—you may safely reckon on that; it is almost incredible the distance that a fox will carry a heavy duck or turkey.

Distrust, then, the complainant whose dwelling is very nigh to a fox covert, when he declares the depredations of the fox to be unceasing; for, though my fowls roam at large within two hundred yards of a gorse, yet in six years I have lost but one. On one occasion, in a very dry summer, a fox resorted to a neighbouring small plantation, and, stealing out at midday, was seen by my stableman to stalk an old grey cock, whose peculiarly raucous voice had ofttimes "murdered sleep," and was my special abhorrence.

Alas! they holloa'd and warned Reynard off just as he was about to make the fatal spring that would have rid me of my plague for ever. This was the only other instance of even attempted robbery in six years; and yet that covert invariably held foxes, and one summer harboured two litters.

The curious mixture of boldness and timidity, which is one of the characteristics of the fox, has been noticed by many writers and by all sportsmen. When a fox is once fairly away and the pursuit has begun, it needs but the sight of a human being in the distance to turn him from his course and cause him to pass, without entering, the strongest coverts, where shelter and safety seem assured. But, on the other hand, when he is headed immediately after breaking covert, he will return to it in spite of the most strenuous efforts to ride him out, and will face a field of horsemen and thread his way through them with extraordinary boldness and determination. This well-known fact should surely be taken into account by hunting men, and should cause them implicitly to obey orders and remain where they are posted by the M.F.H. at the covert side, for *a skirting horseman has made many a bad fox*. The best-laid plans of foxes, as well as those of mice and men, gang aft agley, and we may be sure that this 'cutest of wild beasts lays out his plan of campaign as soon as he is aroused from his noonday siesta by the note of a hound.

We who have noticed his proceedings can well imagine what poor Reynard's thought must be when that happens. Finder, from the thickest spot in the

gorse, is impelled to throw out an eager whimper; Fugleman, Singer, and Rallywood press to the sound, and the bushes crack and wave as they press. Their ecstatic notes set the horses capering, thrill the very souls of their riders, and bring vexation and alarm to the ruddy-brown animal who lies coiled up like a snake among the driest of grass or bracken in the sunniest spot in the covert. Quickly getting on his legs, Reynard glides *ventre a terre* to his earth. It is stopped, but he guesses as much, and, by no means disconcerted, he threads his way to the covert fence. If the coast be clear he will away at once to Pinch-me-near Forest, but the chatter of many tongues, the stamp and snort of steeds, and the aroma of tobacco proclaim that here is stationed the field; and though he probably guesses that his best chance would be to charge out straight through the throng, when many of them would infallibly ride after him and completely foil the scent, yet such policy is contrary to his inclinations and the traditions of his race.

He wishes to slip away unseen, and the first few moments of his flight he would desire to devote to consideration of chances.

He knows so well all the surroundings of the covert, you see! If he can slip through the usual smeuse in the thick bullfinch which bounds the next field, not a soul will observe him, and then he can steal along by the side-fence and have time to peer into the lane where that infernal dog coursed him the last time, and try if he can cross in safety.

So he stealthily works round by the covert fence,

looks out, drops into the field beyond, and makes for the smeuse. Alas! Mr. Luckless comes round the corner to light that cigar, or Mr. Dawdle, who is late as usual, and hasn't been to the meet, enters the field by the gate at the far side and meets the fox face to face. He turns, but already the hounds are emerging from covert, so he circles back in face of the horsemen now pressing for a start. "Hang it! they are everywhere!" he says to himself. "The dog in the lane will have heard this row and be on the watch; better back to covert at once." So, regardless of whip-cracking or shouts, he darts through the throng and gets back to shelter, where, perchance, bad scent and foiled ground serve him so well that he is left in peace. "What a beastly bad fox!" say Messrs. Luckless and Dawdle. Well, perhaps he is so now, for he has learned a bad lesson, though he wasn't a bad one when he first slipped away, but both looked like going and meant it.

That "the good fox is the one which goes away first" is an accepted truth, but this is by no means always the case, and I knew a little vixen who resided in a gorse covert where foxes were plentiful—I knew a little vixen, I say, who stoutly refused to leave her home so long as another fox remained; but then away she would go, and invariably over about the best line she could choose, while we were seeking for "passes" in wired fences and railway crossings in pursuit of a comrade who always selected the most undesirable country in the locality.

It is most difficult to account for the extraordinary

number of what hunting men call "bad foxes" which are found in some seasons.

Foxes that have been badly frightened by human beings soon become bad foxes, and seldom can be induced to face the open without extraordinary pressure. The attentions of their four-footed enemies in the covert are troublesome, but preferable to even the sight of the hated biped in scarlet outside.

And from consideration of bad foxes one's thoughts turn to scent—the great mystery of Diana, the puzzle to huntsmen from the days of Nimrod to the time of Tom Firr. What more can be said or written upon so perplexing a subject? Truly, I fear but little that is really useful, though experiences and reflections may possibly be found entertaining. Theories, axioms, and hard-and-fast rules have from time to time been put forward concerning scent and the causes which influence it, and all in their turn have been contradicted and upset. When—

"Each horse wore a crupper,
Each squire a pigtail,"

our ancestors believed in the "southerly wind and the cloudy sky" as heralds of a hunting morning. Half a century passes, and Squire Delmé Radcliffe, in eloquent prose, begs for a northerly breeze to bring him scent and sport. The "lowering wintry morn" is welcomed, in spite of its gloom, by the ardent fox-hunter, and the rays of bright Phœbus bring no brightness to his soul; some seasons ago a continuance of sport, such as is seldom seen, was

enjoyed all over the Sister Isle in the sunniest and bluest sort of weather.

“There’s a scent, you may swear, by the pace that they drive,
You must tackle to work with a will;
For as sure as you stand in your stirrups alive,
It’s a case of a run and a kill.”

I recollect listening to the remarks of a number of sportsmen one morning a few years ago, as they watched a fine pack of foxhounds gambolling round the hunt servants at the trysting-place.

“I think there won’t be much of a scent to-day,” quoth No. 1; “so much dew and spiders’ webs on the hedges.”

“Sure not to run to-day,” said No. 2; “look at those hounds rolling about.”

“Never a scent with a north-west wind,” remarked No. 3. “What do you think, Sir Charles?”

The veteran thus addressed moved not the cigar from his lips, but made answer between the puffs. “Well, you young fellows seem to know all about it. Now, I’m just old enough to know that I know nothing about it at all!”

Caustic the remark, but correct; for what followed? Twenty minutes later hounds found their fox in a woodland, and made the sylvan alleys fairly ring with their melody, and the dry beech leaves whirled up in red clouds in their tracks. They swept like a pent-up torrent along a broad avenue, hard, white, and solid as cement, twisted through a gateway into a stretch of deer park, across which they flew, leaving spurring horsemen far behind. Then throwing themselves over

the deer-park wall, raced into their fox—a grey old campaigner—in the middle of a heavy field of plough.

“They didn’t give you much time to look at the spiders’ webs on the fences, I fancy,” grimly remarked Sir Charles, as he noted the smoking steeds and perspiring riders.

Yet in all the observations I listened to at the meet there was a certain amount of sense and truth born of tradition, and, perhaps, experience. It *is* a bad sign when cobwebs are seen and when hounds roll, and the north-west wind is, *as a rule*, unfavourable to scent, but *not always*. Why not always? Therein lies the insoluble mystery. So many abler pens than mine have written, so many authoritative tongues have spoken on the subject, that I jot down these reflections of my own with much diffidence and humility.

Though it is, I believe, an acknowledged fact that some dog foxes emit a stronger scent than others, yet I am inclined to think that, apart from the effect of soil and atmosphere, and the nature of the vegetation through which a fox passes, we are, in this vexed question of scent, a good deal more dependent upon the particular animal we are hunting than is generally supposed.

I have, or had, to be thankful for a gift—or is it knack?—of viewing foxes away from covert, and during the pursuit, which does not seem to be shared to the same extent by many of my friends; and, thanks to this power of observation, I have several times noted a certain occurrence in the hunting-field, which I have no doubt has also been manifest to many readers of these pages. Let me give, as an example,

the first occasion on which I saw it happen. This was in Ireland, and, alas ! it is many, many years ago.

The Curraghmore hounds had met at Listerlin, and were drawing a gorse covert—name forgotten. How vividly the whole scene comes before me as I write ! The pleasant balmy afternoon on the grassy hillside, the wild, green fields of the Ross country stretching away to meet the dull grey sky ; John Duke's eager face as he rises in his stirrups, and twists his mouth to cheer his darlings ; the glorious music that rose from all parts of the covert—I can hear it now, here in this old arm-chair.

Three rustics on the top of a bank in the Brownstown direction will surely head the fox if he should break that way, and even Lord Waterford's sonorous voice fails to convey to them his wishes that they should come down or hide behind a gorse bush on the fence.

Away goes a magnificent fox, with a tag to his brush of really dazzling whiteness, and straight for those rustics he heads. The pack swarm out not a hundred yards behind him. The excitement is intense, and just as his lordship appears to be about to withdraw his restraint from the eager but obedient field, a lady's horse elects to lie down and have a pleasing little roll. Among those who assisted the Amazon I was not the least irate, and the flick of the whip which brought that misguided quadruped to his feet was an exceedingly bitter one. What a curious sight did we behold when gallantry permitted us to turn our attention to the chase ! Hounds had been able to run but slowly ; the fox had been headed by the

rustics, had jumped the fence to his right, and under its shelter was hurrying back to covert. The field, with the exception of our "humane society," was following the slowly returning pack, which patiently puzzled out Reynard's returning steps. I had nothing then to do but to remain still. I had lost no start, and equanimity was restored. But no sooner had our fox re-entered the covert, when, at the same spot from which he made his exit, a second fox slipped away. No. 2 was a great dark fellow, a rough-looking customer, with shaggy fur and full brush unadorned, however, with a particle of white. Away he went right in the tracks of No. 1, but no rustics bothered him; the yokels, in high delight, were "following the hoont" back to the covert. It was my privilege to hold my hat in the air, and to convey to Duke what had happened. He elected to follow this fox, as the coast was clear, but meanwhile hounds were back in covert, and there was a slight delay in getting them to the horn. But few minutes had elapsed since the first fox broke; there was no change in the weather, no overhanging clouds had passed away, and the second fox was running a foiled line. Yet the way those beautiful hounds dusted that unfortunate was a sight to see, and right merry was the dart which followed. How well I remember it! One hard-riding pursuer will recollect it to his dying day, I fear—a broken leg is a sorry memento of a day's sport. But maybe he has forgotten it; he certainly appeared to have done so, to judge by the way he was going last season.

This much is certain, that the first fox left little or



Photo}

[W. Davey & Sons, Harrogate.]

MR. ISAAC BELL.

Master of the Kilkenny Hounds.

no scent, and hounds could run him but slowly. Five or six minutes later, over the same ground, foiled as it was before the second fox crossed it, they ran another fox like wildfire, and both were dog foxes, I am sure. Since then I have noted much the same thing happen more than once, and have several times seen hounds change from a fox they had been running hard to one that they could scarcely hunt, though the latter was a very short distance in front of them. On every one of these occasions I have heard men express astonishment at the sudden change of scent, but cannot recollect anybody suggesting that this was due to the change of foxes, as I firmly believe it was.

I mentioned that both the foxes I saw hunted by the Curraghmore hounds were dog foxes; because it is a well-established fact that a heavy vixen, or one that is nursing her cubs, does not, *as a rule*, give out as strong a scent as a dog fox. This must have been noticed at the end of a season by all hunting men who take interest in the sport and to whom the glory of the gallop is not the sole aim and object of hunting. But here, again, there is no hard-and-fast rule, and occasionally hounds will race into such a vixen in a few screeching minutes, though they may seem reluctant to break her up when killed. To the best of my knowledge, I have seen a bagman hunted but twice in my life, and I would that my score in this game had been a duck's egg. In both instances hounds ran in a puzzled, purposeless sort of manner; exactly, in fact, in the style in which the celebrated Mr. Facey Romford's hounds hunted

the gift fox into Mr. Hazey's preserves. From this I gather that there is much difference between the scent of the Leadenhall gentleman and that of the genuine article. This, of course, by no means proves that wild foxes have not all the same scent; but it happens that the casual manner in which I once saw a keen pack of foxhounds hunt a bagman first set me thinking that all wild dog foxes might not throw out the same odour, and subsequent observations have satisfied me that they do not.

But to what purpose, these reflections upon scent? What is the use of bothering about the matter? After all, it is not in our power to alter it; and, if we could, we should probably do harm. How many of us would come out hunting if we knew a bad-scenting day was before us? And yet what fun we have, what pretty hound work we oftentimes witness, what lots of sociability we enjoy, even on a bad-scenting day! For my part, I think that much of the wondrous enchantment connected with the chase would be lost were we always sure "to ride to a scent breast high." Hunting rises superior to all other pastimes by reason of its infinite variety; and anticipation is not the least of its pleasures—the anticipation of sport which is so largely dependent upon this perplexing scent.

To whom, then, can these reflections be of any sort of benefit?

From my window, as I pen these words, the sight of the eternal rain pelting upon the brown surface of a Highland lochy, and the dense wet mist on the moors has brought sorrow to my soul. But lo! a

happy thought arises, dispels the gloom, and permits me to bring this chapter to a close in a spirit of tolerable cheerfulness.

Perchance, after a bad morning's sport next winter, "ingenious youth" may restrain his impulse to go home, may recall the words of the enthusiast who scribbles these lines, and say to himself, "Perhaps the afternoon fox may possess a more powerful perfume!" Then it may come to pass that he shall stay out and enjoy "the run of the season." At all events, let the said youth remember that the lines of Whyte-Melville I quoted on an earlier page, describe the only way, when hounds are in the open, of ascertaining whether there is, or is not, a scent.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUNTED FOX AND HIS WILES

I DO not think I ever remember to have seen so few coverts drawn blank as in the present season. The litters did well, it is true, and there were plenty of them ; it was a good breeding year though I heard of no very large litters anywhere. Yet, though most countries are well stocked with foxes they have had just as many before now, only, I think, they have never been so easy to find.

It is the extraordinarily wet season that has brought this about, I have little doubt, for a fox would find it a very difficult matter to make himself really comfortable lying out in such a winter as this. Those who reside in the country cannot fail to have noticed how, without any severe frost, all the undergrowth in the coverts, save the very stems of the briars, has disappeared. The tangle of weeds and coarse grasses which made our fences so blind has gone long ago, and gone without very much aid from King Frost. Fairly battered down flat by the ceaseless downpour, it has simply rotted away.

No chance for a dry bed for poor Reynard in the big double fence, osier-bed, or little outlying brake this winter; and many a nice snug drain, with well-sanded floor, which has sufficed for an earth in dry seasons, now carries a foaming torrent. Remains then to the fox the shelter of the gorse, the privet, the pleached laurel covert, the rocky fastnesses of some wild woodland, where also among the roots of some giants of the forest may be discovered the Castle of Malepartus.

But the plenitude of foxes *in the coverts* this season has, I think, been the cause of the somewhat unsatisfactory termination of very many good runs that I have seen. Foxes, it appears to me, do not at present trouble themselves to make for some well-known drain, but go straight for a breeding-earth or fox covert, and if the latter be reached a change of foxes almost invariably occurs, much to the distress and misery of many a huntsman.

“Why is it that fresh foxes invariably spring up, invariably go away, and that hounds invariably change?” some one asked despairingly the other day, when the pursuit had to be stopped owing to the lateness of the hour, as has so often been the case this season in every Irish hunting country. Few persons except those immediately connected with the pack, or the very small minority who are deeply interested in hound-work, ever credit the foxhound with the wonderful sagacity and powers of memory he possesses. Folk see the fox away, or hear that he has gone, and if sufficiently well mounted they see hounds pursuing him; but few of them guess

that the majority of the pack know most of the game a little better than any of us. When, after the "forty bright minutes," or steady hunting run, we near the well-known surroundings of some favourite covert, is it to be supposed that hounds do not know where they are as well as the most determined thruster who follows them so closely, or the steady "pointsman" who has come best pace by gaps and bridle-roads?

In the country from which I write, most of our coverts are gorse, and some are commanded by eminences from which the work in covert can be witnessed; and I have noted how, when hounds enter in pursuit of a fox, many of them will not content themselves with smeusing after him through the thick furze in a long-drawn string, but make straight for the good bit of lying where they usually rouse a fox. Up jumps the fresh fellow, and, with a veritable shriek of delight, the hound plunges after him; the gorse is alive now with excited hounds, and, scared out of his life, the fresh fox flies at once, maybe without being viewed; perhaps just a glimpse has been caught of him, or perchance a whipper-in has got round and catches a steady full view of him crossing the middle of the field, and, in the latter case, there should be no doubt as to whether he is the run fox or not.

No, although we have been told, or have read, how to distinguish a fresh fox from a hunted one, I make bold to say that it is not always a very easy matter.

The draggled, mud-stained object that enters a

gorse covert or passes through bracken or long, dry grass, cleans the marks of travel very quickly from his sides, legs, and brush; and, if he pass across a ride close to your horse, allowing you but a glimpse of his back as he steals through the grass, it is not so easy to decide if he has been travelling or not.

A hunted fox moves with drooping brush, we know; but I never see foxes, fresh or beaten, crossing covert-rides with raised brush. At that time the animal, knowing he is liable to be seen, makes as little display as possible.

When a fox, after pursuit, lies up in a patch of gorse, and bolts from it when hounds close with him, he goes away with a rush, makes a last bid for life, and the effort carries him so fast that this, combined with his comparatively clean appearance, causes him sometimes to be mistaken for a fresh fox.

Get a good look at him, though, from a little distance, and if he is in the open the stilty, high-on-the-leg appearance of the run fox cannot be mistaken, and, once seen, will not be forgotten. Last week I saw a fox run very smartly for four or five miles to a large gorse covert on the slope of a heathery hill; above the gorse on top of the hill is a sort of kopje with rocks and boulders strewn about, and from this coign of vantage I had a splendid view of the covert below. I viewed three foxes there, but there was an open space in the gorse on which the snow still was lying, and this the foxes crossed like the figures on the slides of a magic lantern. There was no mistaking the hunted one—he looked absurdly higher than the others; and his *waist* was

very noticeable; but we left him behind a few moments later, for a good fox stole away through the heather, was holloa'd, and naturally the huntsman got his hounds out in pursuit.

There is, of course, a well-known and deep-rooted objection entertained by most huntsmen to killing even a well-beaten fox in a gorse covert. It "stains" the covert, we are told, and the chances are that foxes will desert a covert so stained—for a time. I cannot but think that this objection is somewhat fallacious if the covert be of any size, and one that usually holds several foxes; but in very small gorses, particularly if they have grown to be at all "open," a kill does no doubt have a bad effect. In a season like the present, however, when most coverts are holding well, it seems to me that the hounds might be considered before the reputation of the covert.

No doubt there are numerous difficulties and dangers ahead of the huntsman and whippers-in who on tired horses arrive in the late afternoon within a field or two of a covert towards which the gallant pack are straining after their fox. What is to be done? If a fresh fox goes away and even a few couples come out on his line, it may want a man on a very fresh horse to stop them. The field is scattered and squandered, and our huntsman hardly likes to ask any of the gentlemen on their tired horses to take up positions and lend a hand; while the idea of the whole pack starting away with an old dog fox, empty from his long fast, fresh and fit to run over the next two parishes, fairly makes him shudder. "Best stop them when we can! Get

round them, there!" he shouts, and so has ended many a good chase in the last three months.

But, if horses be not done to a turn, I myself would like to see the pack make a fairer ending; the sportsmen who are up to offer their services to stand and view a fox away and help to stop hounds from the fresh one, nay, even to offer the use of their nags to the servants, if the hard-worked steeds of the establishment are more blown than their own.

I remember when I was young hearing Sir John Power, who hunted the Kilkenny hounds for so long, declare that in Ireland they did not understand sticking to their hunted fox like they did in England. "Over here," he said, "every one is mad for another gallop, and ready to holloa a fresh fox away. Half of them do not care a sixpence about hounds getting their fox; they'd much sooner get their ride." Sir John was no doubt a great authority, but my idea is that not many people try to discern the difference between fresh and hunted foxes, which, as I have observed, is not such a very easy matter.

I know of no subject that calls forth such strange variety of opinion as the appearance of even a fresh fox when he is viewed in covert or going away from it. "Biggest fox that ever was seen," says one gentleman, who sees Reynard with fur erect from rage and fear bounce over the covert fence. "Long, lean, greyhound sort of fox," another says, who sees him fairly in his stride slipping smoothly along a field away. "Little bit of a vixen, I should say," remarks a third, viewing him across a road with the moisture on his close-lying fur a few minutes later. Every other man has a

different opinion, and confidently gives it to the world. A friend of my own, however, confides that he gets so excited when he sees a fox that he never seems able to notice any peculiarities, though I would suggest to the tyro that it is well if you have a chance to notice if the fox he views away from covert at the beginning of the run carries a white tag to his brush, and whether that tag be large or small, whether he wears a white waistcoat and collar or is dark all over his chest. These are points which he may be able to distinguish fifty minutes later in the ride of a distant covert, or when Reynard lies stark and stiff upon the sward.

When he lies stark and stiff ! As I pen the words the inappropriate air of certainty they appear to convey presents itself to me, and occasions when our fox has beaten hounds rise to memory. Perhaps we are a little too prone to attribute these failures to kill rather to bad luck on the part of pursuers than to the exceeding cleverness of pursued.

Three or four years ago I used frequently to stay for certain fixtures with a well-known M.F.H., who was beyond all question a very clever huntsman, though I think that few gave him credit for the intense interest he took in the fate of the fox he had been hunting. As a matter of fact, if his hounds and he failed to account for their quarry, though he might appear to make light of the matter he did not in reality, for he would brood over his defeat in the evening, and with pencil, paper, and the ordnance map would strive to elucidate the mystery, often returning next day to make further investigations at

the scene of the disappearance of the last traces of the fugitive.

Several times I have known his investigations to be successful, and I am sure he would be able to relate very many extraordinary escapes of dead-beaten foxes during his long term of mastership. It certainly is very wonderful, the luck that befriends a sinking fox, and those who affect to disbelieve in the animal's possession of any extraordinary cunning cannot have gone with much interest into the question, "What became of the fox?"

I have often read that the hare should be credited with far more cunning than the fox. It may be so, but personally I have never seen this displayed when hunting with harriers—a sport in which I have not indulged for a good many years—for the wiles of a hunted hare, her loops and squattings, her tremendous springs from the squatting-place, all seemed to be tolerably known to the huntsmen, and have often been described, notably by Surtees, who declares that "the manœuvres of a hunted hare are simply astonishing," and in several of his novels gives a description of a hare hunt in which he displays perfect knowledge of a game that, nevertheless, he does not seem to have cared very much about playing, if one may judge by the words he puts in the mouth of John Jorrocks.

Another writer, as great as Surtees, also expresses a very high opinion of the 'cuteness of the hare, for Whyte-Melville makes Mr. Tilbury Nogo relate that "it is needless to describe the difficulties I had to encounter, or the ignorance I was obliged to conceal, in my first attempts at hunting the wiliest animal of

the chase, for in shrewd cunning and baffling subterfuge I conceive a hare to be infinitely more deceptive than a fox." And again: "I have heard it said by men who have distinguished themselves in both pursuits, that the science and ingenuity required to kill a good hare are even greater than those which are necessary to give an account of a bad fox."

It is perhaps the "bad fox" that oftenest displays the most cunning, but the escape of many and many a hero who has stood up before hounds till horses have stood still, has often been due to his marvellous cunning and resource. The keenest huntsman with the best pack of hounds can never be sure of his fox till he has him in hand, and, though they may have brought him along through flocks of sheep, into which he has purposely run, across rivers, through cattle-stain and coverts, "crawling with fresh foxes," and have viewed him dead beaten in the next field, it often happens that all traces disappear entirely and as suddenly as if he had "wanished into thin hair," as old Jorrocks has it.

My friend, of whom I made mention above, was sadly bothered one day by the unaccountable disappearance of a fox he had been hunting hard for an hour. At the end we ran towards a fairly high demesne wall with a road alongside it, and a view was caught of our fox as we came down a slight declivity; he was getting over the wall from the road, and apparently with a good deal of difficulty. The M.F.H. lifted the pack and carried them through the avenue gate. We were then in a somewhat narrow park of sound old grass, which was bounded on the other side

by a deep and broad river with tree-clad banks. Hounds, on coming to the place where the fox had crossed the wall, struck the line at once and tore away over the grass; a ruined cottage with a small yard enclosed by a low, tumbledown wall lay between them and the river, and along close by the side of this wall they ran, and once past it went even faster than before, but slackened their speed on reaching the river bank. The pack ran for a short time after passing the cottage with such fire and so very fast that no one had the slightest doubt but that the fox had reached the river-bank, and there was a holloa higher up the river-side, to which, if I remember rightly, hounds were taken and there a fresh fox was seen, I believe; anyhow we did no more good with our hunted friend.

The M.F.H. was much chagrined because he did not handle his fox, whose proceedings, however, had been witnessed by the herd who acted as covert keeper. This man afterwards said he saw the fox cross the wall and make straight for the old buildings. On reaching them he ran close alongside the low wall, and went on towards the river for about a hundred yards, when he stopped and turned short round in his tracks back to the wall. Jumping up on this, he sprang over a gap or old gateway on to the wall of the yard, which ran at right angles to that upon which he had jumped, scrambled along this, and, reaching the gable of the old cottage, climbed up and disappeared. The pack, when the strong counterfoil was reached, of course ran harder than ever towards the river, and overrunning the line carried on to the wooded bank. The fox was not headed and could not have seen the herd, who

watched his manœuvres from behind a tree. "Why didn't you holloa?" was asked very naturally. "Is it to have my good fox killed?" was the reply. "Not for the handsomest pound note that ever was printed would I let a bawl out of me!"

It was the cat in Æsop's fables, if I remember right, that told the fox who was boasting of his many wiles to defeat hounds, that he had but one trick, and that was to climb a tree. The hounds suddenly appearing, the cat performed the tree trick successfully, but Reynard, in spite of all his cunning, was torn to pieces. In these days, however, the fox has learned the use of the tree as a means of escape from his pursuers, and I fancy that a good many more runs end in this manner than most of us have any idea of, and it is curious how difficult it is to see a crouching fox on the branch of a tree when he knows that his enemies are beneath it.

On the last day of the season, two years ago, the hounds that hunt this country had a capital run over a good grass country, and had got pretty close to their fox, who, fairly run out, was being viewed at intervals which became more and more frequent. At last he was seen to enter a large, newly ploughed field—the first bit of tillage we had met, I believe. Here hounds were brought to their noses, and could only hold the line with difficulty. Intent on handling his fox, our huntsman carried them beyond the plough on to a clean grass field, where, however, there was not a vestige of a line. The fence dividing the tillage from the grass was a green bank of fair size, and this was jumped at many different places by some of the

field. Having made it good forward the huntsman's natural inference was that his fox had lain down in the ploughed field, and very carefully did he try back for him. Foot-people appeared on the scene, and were questioned as to drains or holes, and several of them mounted the bank and watched our baffled endeavours. It was no use, however, and our huntsman looked rather rueful as he said "goodbye," for it was the fall of the curtain. As we plodded homewards we heard a distant holloa far behind us. "The fox was on, after all," we said; but it was not so. On that bank grew one old shabby trunk of a tree, not six feet high, I should think; horses had jumped close to it, and countryfolk had stood on either side of it. When we had long disappeared from view one of these fellows jumped down into the plough, and as he did so the fox jumped down from the tree on to the grass on the other side and made off.

I often pass, on a certain roadside, an old ivy-covered thorn, which saved the life of a good fox when very hard pressed by Mr. Robert Watson and his hounds, who had been hard at him for quite an hour. He was holloa'd and viewed "just in front of ye" ever so many times, and a sharp look-out was kept by more than one of us on the green hillside beyond the road as we neared it. Hounds swarmed on to this road, were cast beyond it, held up the road, down the road, and tried back without success. "Must be a drain here somewhere," said the M.F.H., and search was made by the roadside. I held in a whipper-in's horse, I remember, while he scrambled from the road into the field, and stood under an old

thorn-tree when I did so, talking to an elderly gentleman with a spade in his hand, who expressed an opinion "that thim dogs is no [adjective] good at all," for didn't he "see the fox coming up out of the bog not two perch in front of thim." I met my ancient friend a few days after as I drove past the same spot, and he stopped me. "A great hoontsman *you* are," said he, "and the tail of that [something] of a fox hanging not half a foot above the nose of ye!" And he then told me how a few minutes after we had left he saw the fox slip down from the tree under which I had been standing. I examined the place, and certainly the fox could not have been crouching more than two feet above my head when I held the horse for the whipper-in. There are few sportsmen, I imagine, who cannot call to mind some tree tales similar to the above; I can recollect several, but these two, somehow, have a very abiding place in my memory.

A fisherman once gave me very interesting details of the efforts of a fox we were hunting to baffle his pursuers, which, however, in this case proved futile. He was trying for a salmon a little above a bridge when he heard the cry of hounds on the far side of the river, and shortly after saw a fox, which was evidently crossing by the bridge, appear upon the parapet and scramble down to the beach on the side of the river where he was fishing. Probably the fox may have been headed on the roadway, but anyhow, he now took to the water above the bridge not far from the fisherman, and swam back to the other side. On landing he passed under a dry

arch of the bridge and continued his way down stream by the side of the river. I think that fox must have been born under a most unlucky star, for I always considered it a bit of a fluke that we killed him. The fox had taken to the road for some little distance before he came to the bridge, where hounds threw up. On the right-hand side of the road was a high wall, quite unjumpable, and joining the parapet of the bridge. On the left or up-stream side it was easy to jump from the road into the fields just at the end of the bridge where the dry arch was. Without hesitation our huntsman jumped into the field, and on landing saw the dry arch and passed through it, thus putting such hounds as followed him at once on the line of their fox; and the rest of the pack scoring to cry, they killed a little further down the river bank. Piscator declared that there were no foot-people or carts on his side of the river to head the fox, and that his jumping down, recrossing the stream, and passing through the dry arch was simply a clever plan to evade his foes and gain the shelter of big woods about two miles below the bridge. Some hounds were feathering along the roadway of the bridge when the huntsman turned off into the field above it, and, unless he knew of the dry arch and was determined to make good the ground in the direction of the shelter, I never could understand why he did not hold his hounds across the bridge. But he was one whose sagacity was seldom at fault, and was a worthy match for even so clever a fox as this one, who, I almost forgot to say, had run over fourteen miles before he reached the river, which

he had already once crossed about four miles higher up.

If our fisherman's view of the case was correct, I think the cunning displayed more than equals any that I have ever heard of being displayed by *lepus timidus*, though I have quoted high opinions to the effect that it requires much science to bring a good hare to hand. Sir Reginald Graham tells us that the late Lord Suffolk once asked Mr. George Lane Fox, M.F.H., his opinion of hare-hunting. "I have always," he replied, "understood it to be a most scientific amusement." Not for nothing, then, has *our* sport been termed "the noble science."

I have been told, apropos of the above story, that bridges seem to have a sort of fascination for the hunted fox, and two instances have been related to me of foxes having scrambled down to the buttress of a bridge and lain curled up on a projecting part of it. There can be little doubt but that foxes know well how quickly their foot-scent evaporates from stones or masonry.

The run of February 11, 1908, enjoyed by the Waterford hounds was one of the very best of a season brimful of most excellent sport from the first, and had a curious conclusion. It lasted for two hours and forty-five minutes, and at no time till the very end did the pace become "dead slow," while parts of it were decidedly fast, and at one time hounds distinctly had the best of the game, and were unattended. Of course, it seems most unlikely that the same fox was in front all the time; but that they did not change near the end of the run has since



Photo]

MR. ARTHUR POLLOK.
Master of the Kildare.

[Robinson.]

been proved, and the M.F.H. is now inclined to think that there was no change at all. When the countryman in that tiny valley just before the end gave us news that he had viewed him recently, hounds had their hackles up and crossed the little strath with such fire that it certainly seemed "all up" with Reynard. No covert lay in front, and the sea cliffs near Tramore seemed much too distant. Then came the road, then the lane, with the burnt hillside on the right, up which hounds puzzled so perseveringly till all traces were lost; but there was a farmhouse just to the right of the end of the lane—a farm, and a stack of straw, and a ladder leaning up against it. An hour after hounds had left comes the farmer with his pitchfork, and climbing the ladder, finds the travel-worn fox, who had climbed up the ladder, and now decamped by the same means.

In a rough part of South Kilkenny hunted by the Waterford hounds, it is an old trick for Reynard to run along the top of these rough stone walls for a considerable distance, when only very tender-nosed hounds can make it good. During Mr. Pollok's mastership of the Waterford, they hunted a fox for over a mile and a half completely round Corbally Wood; he ran along the top of the wall all the time, and continued to travel along an adjoining wall on the north side of the hill. Mr. Sargent, in his *Thoughts on Sport*, also relates an instance of a bitch named Matchless, bred by Henry Lord Waterford, running her fox along the walls in South Kilkenny.

One of the most curious endeavours of a beaten fox

to escape from his pursuers was related by Mr. Harvey Bayly, who was twice Master of the Rufford Hounds, and I think the incident took place during his first mastership. In this the ladder also played a part. Hounds ran their fox to some farm buildings, and stopped at a gate where a ladder leaning against the wall showed the way into the open door of a loft. As hounds could make nothing more of it, a whipper-in bethought him of ascending the ladder into the loft, where he found no fox, but his strong odour. This loft proved to be over a cart stable, and, surmising that the fox had passed down by the manger into the stable below, the whipper-in gave information, and the stable was entered by the door. It was very dark, and occupied by but one horse, an old, worn-out cart-mare, who stood in the corner stall.

Considerable search failed to reveal the fox, but suddenly some one espied him squatting down *on the back* of the old mare, who did not seem in the least perturbed by his presence. The fox was shortly afterwards killed by the hounds.

I heard of a somewhat similar case in Kilkenny long ago; the fox came down from the loft to the manger, but this one escaped when the door was opened. I have twice known a fox climb on to a roof and go down the chimney; the last occasion being after a memorable gallop in Carlow, from Newtown Hill to "Moll Doolan's," near Milford. The brush of this fox for a long time decorated the sanctum of a relative of my own.

I have also known the flue of a greenhouse give refuge to a fox more than once, and in Henry Lord

Waterford's diary mention is twice made of a fox seeking safety in the same sort of retreat.

Somerville, in *The Chase*, notices the fact of the beaten fox betaking himself to the haunts of men for shelter, having discovered many hiding-places in his nightly rambles and being fully aware how certain unsavoury drains would effectually destroy any traces of scent.

Of stories of foxes and trees there is no end, but I may say that I have seen a large cedar-tree growing close to one of the great houses in the North of England that I was informed often "held" three or four foxes in its branches.

One more story. There is an old deer-park wall near my home, and some rough, broken ground on the hillside beyond it. I was shown by an old man an ivy-tree growing several feet away from this ancient wall, and of it he told me the following tale: A certain Major K——, long since departed, had a pack of harriers, and they used to find an outlying fox in a patch of gorse some miles beyond the rough hill. To this deer-park wall they used to run him time after time, and there invariably lose him; but one day my informant was working in the adjacent field, and saw a fox suddenly appear on top of the wall, run along it till opposite the ivy-tree, when he gave a splendid spring, and landed among its branches, where he remained. On this occasion he had evidently defeated hounds earlier in the run, for he was not followed; but news of the manœuvre was brought to the Major, and the observer was ordered to take post in the tree on a certain day. On that day, at about noon, sure

enough the cry of hounds was heard in hot pursuit on the hillside above ; then the fox appeared on the wall as before, and picked his way along it in leisurely fashion till opposite to the tree, though the cry then sounded very close to him. He was about to make his spring when he perceived that the tree was already occupied, so dropped back off the wall, and, of course, the orthodox tragedy followed.

CHAPTER XII

GORSE COVERTS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

“Oh, how they bustled round him!
How merrily they found him;
And how stealthily they wound him,
Through each dingle and each dell!”

TAKING Squire Western as their type, it has been the fashion for many writers, ever since the days of Fielding, to speak of fox-hunters as of beings who were dead to all sense of beauty, poetry, or imagination. Somerville, however, was a Master of Hounds, as “Cecil” has found out for us, and that true poet, Charles Kingsley, was a sportsman to the backbone; while Whyte-Melville has somewhere written that “there is something of poetry in every man who rides hard across a country.”

There was the very quintessence of sport in the doings of our ancestors, though their skulls were adorned with the unpoetic pigtail; in their early hours, in their quest for the drag of a travelling fox, and their keen appreciation of the beauties of the dawning day, which have all been so admirably described by Somerville in his famous poem. And it

always fascinated me to hear a late well-known M.F.H. relate how his father used to wait with his hounds on a wild, heathery hill "for the day to break that he might drag up to his fox."

For my part, I believe that the impulse which drew those ancestors of ours from downy pillows and port-laden slumbers, when "bright Chanticleer proclaimed the morn," was tinged with a strong feeling of romance and poetry.

Few men in these galloping days go out with a view of deriving much pleasure from seeing hounds *find* their fox, and, indeed, the chorus of the invisible pack from the green depths of a gorse must be but a scanty joy to the seniors, who declare that what they now care about is "to see a fox well found." The multitude, however, prefers the gorse covert, with its surroundings of green pasture-lands, to the echoing woodland with its heavy rides, up which we splash nearly to our girths. Taking all things into consideration, perhaps the multitude is right, and, personally, I have derived endless pleasure, both in summer and winter, from a gorse covert, which for many years has been my constant and pleasing care, but which now, alas! presents a sad appearance of blackened desolation.

Its glories have departed. No more does the splendid sheet of gold add beauty to the landscape in the merry month of May; and what more lovely spectacle on earth is there than a gorse covert in full bloom? Do you remember what Linnæus said about gorse, or how Wallace, in his *Malay Archipelago*, wrote that "during twelve years spent amid the grandest tropical

vegetation, I saw nothing comparable to the effect produced on our landscape" by gorse and heather in blossom? And, as a traveller in many lands, I can fully endorse his opinion. My gorse, however, had grown very tall and hollow, and the stems of the bushes were bare for several feet from the roots. There was no bottom in it, no under-covert; nevertheless, when hounds paid their first visit last season, it held a leash of foxes. After that it was always drawn blank, for, though frequented by foxes, they must have experienced a feeling of insecurity, and the earth-stopper's visit was invariably sufficient notice to quit. So the edict went forth, the covert was cut down, or in some parts burned, and though thick bunches of tender gorse are now sprouting at the roots of the old plants, it will, I fear, be two years ere the note of a hound can be heard in it again. But, Phoenix-like, it will rise from its ashes, and, with a new addition to its size already in growth, it is to be hoped that foxes will always seek a shelter in this favourite spot, and never again be found wanting as long as gorse is in blossom, and osculation in fashion.

In planting gorse coverts, when it is practicable to do so they should, of course, be made large enough to enable one half to be cut down at a time, so as to have always a covert standing. Three acres of strong young gorse take a lot of drawing, and in the beginning of winter will be found almost impregnable if the gorse seed has been very thickly sown. The thickly sown covert, however, does not last long, for the plants have not room to spread, and the stems

grow up into long cane-like sticks, bearing no undergrowth, in a very few years; and, unless gorse grows really strong an exceptionally heavy fall of snow will often break down and ruin the whole covert. It seems a good plan in situations which do not appear to be favourable to the growth of gorse, to plough the land in broad furrows and sow the seed in drills; but this system is said to have its attendant disadvantages, for foxes get into the habit of travelling only in the furrows, and are liable to be chopped by hounds.

Happy the hunting country that is not dependent on artificial coverts to harbour its foxes, but has plenty of good woodlands, spinnies wherein grow lots of strong under-covert, sheltered dingles, and wild, scrub-clad glens. In such a country all that coverts require in spring is repairs of the fences, which must be taken in hand as soon as "the last card" has been worked through, and is usually not a very heavy job. It is very different where the "evergreen plant," immortalised by the poet laureate of the Tarporeley Hunt, forms almost the only shelter for the fox, for now is the time that these coverts require most careful attention—attention, too, which in these days has become very costly.

No hard-and-fast rules can be laid down for the care of a gorse covert, for so very much depends upon the nature of the soil. Where the ground is good the covert will require unremitting attention from the first, for the grasses in very rich soil will inevitably choke the young gorse if the sod be not skimmed off before the sowing is done, and the labour will be in vain. In the country from which I write

we are almost entirely dependent on artificial gorse coverts, and the practice when laying out a new covert has almost invariably been to plough up the land and take a crop of oats off it, putting in the gorse seeds, in the same manner that grass seeds are sown, with the oats. This plan, while it prepares the land for the gorse, has the advantage of bringing something in to pay for the cost of what is often a very expensive undertaking. In light land it succeeds very well, but where it is of extra good quality I have known the natural grasses to reappear and fairly beat the gorse.

In the most successful of our coverts the seed has been sown broadcast; some recommend sowing in broad drills, but a great authority has rather condemned this fashion, as it leaves trenches in which foxes are liable to be chopped, though I cannot say I am able to call to mind an instance of this.

When the gorse is fairly established in good soil it grows with great rapidity—far more quickly than it does on the light land to which it seems more suited and where it sows itself and takes root easily. For this reason it is impossible to lay down any rule as to the length of time a covert will last in a holding condition before it requires cutting. That can only be ascertained by close inspection; that inspection should be made in the first days of March, and followed *as quickly as possible* by action whatever course is adopted.

The ideal gorse covert is always said to be one large enough to admit of half being cut down while the other half is holding; but where practicable I would

much prefer to have two small separate gorses on the same land; this, for a variety of reasons which have appeared to me since I have been in charge of a district. In light land, for one thing, where the gorse covert is thriving, the ubiquitous rabbit is pretty sure to appear. This is by some considered to be an advantage as providing food for the foxes, but to my mind the rabbit is ever the bane of the gorse covert and the curse of fox-hunting. When once even a few rabbits make their appearance in a gorse, if half or any portion of the covert has to be cut down, that portion must be most carefully wired round with a three-foot rabbit-netting—here extra expense comes in—and every rabbit-hole dug out, for there is nothing the dear little bunnies love better than the tender sprouts of gorse; they nibble these off with marvellous assiduity as soon as the green tit-bits appear. Half a dozen rabbits will do more damage to an acre of sprouting gorse than any one would believe who had not seen their depredations. This wiring-in of the cut-down portion of the covert to protect it against rabbits is absolutely necessary, but it is a terrible disadvantage, for it causes foxes to be chopped when hounds are drawing the standing part. I have seen this happen more than once in the same covert. Now, with two separate coverts you cut the whole of one down, and getting fairly to work at the rabbits, ought easily to be able to exterminate them. When gorse likes the soil it will grow so strong in twelve months as to be quite safe from the attentions of the rabbit who only cares for the young shoots. With all the gorse down and the fences clean, it should not be a difficult matter

to clear away all the rabbits from two and a half acres, which is quite sufficient for a good gorse covert, if properly tended ; and when once the bunnies are banished your care should be never to let them reappear again. Moreover, with the rabbits you will have banished brass snares, traps, poaching curs (both four-legged and two), and will have brought the great essential to fox-preservation to your covert, to wit, absolute quiet. But when half the covert is cut down this absolute quiet is not so easily secured.

When a covert is still holding well, owing, perhaps, to its careful preservation, it is often difficult for those in authority to order it to be cut down, even if it is growing tall and hollow. But to let it stand for yet another year, as is so often done, is the most mistaken policy. Whenever the stems grow bare and one sees on stooping that the covert has lost its matted appearance and become hollow, *down with it!* It may hold for another year, but foxes don't like it, and the young gorse will spring more quickly if it be cut before the stems become very thick, and their strong roots take too much out of the soil.

"A stitch in time saves nine." So when the covert, or a part of it, is condemned, set to work at once to cut it, and when cut and removed let the fence receive your best attention and see that all gaps be mended. The cutting of a gorse covert was very easily managed long ago ; indeed, there was a time when folk would pay to be allowed to cut and cart the furze away, but now furze is valueless as fuel. No baker wants it for his oven as in olden days ; no cottager seems to care about it for his fire ; and so one has to pay pretty

heavily for the cutting and removal of what was once a marketable commodity.

I have heard, and read also, that it is a good plan to "lay" and peg down the gorse stems when they grow high; but this is not my experience, nor is it recommended by one or two Masters of Foxhounds who have tried it. It makes but a slovenly looking job, after all. It is difficult to draw, and foxes are apt to be left behind in it; it sickens hounds, who hate the stuff through which they can't hunt their fox properly; and for that reason, if for no other, this treatment of a gorse covert is to be condemned.

I have heard of a gorse covert, a small patch of which is devoted to a perpetual stick or rubbish heap. Some strong posts are driven into the ground a short distance apart, the posts about eighteen inches above ground; laths or poles are nailed from one post to the other, forming a support for branches, thorn bushes, hedge clippings, roots of trees, gorse, or any sort of covering. This covert, I am told, is never drawn blank, and if your covert is situated in a hairy country, I am sure the plan is a good one; but in a stone wall or clear bank country I fear the material would be difficult to find for this useful *annexe*.

Where there is an artificial earth in the covert it should have been very carefully examined before now. The old grey badger has a way of establishing himself in early winter in these artificial earths, and his presence remains often unsuspected. If earths that are in good order remain unused, or if the covert is not a large one and fails to hold, suspect then the presence of the badger, who is going to alter the

interior architecture of the earth to suit himself, blocking up certain passages, enlarging chambers, and filling his sleeping-place with a wonderful quantity of hay or grass procured from—who shall say where? In that earth no vixen will bring out her cubs, nor will she move them into it from outside till all traces of the badgers have disappeared. Such at least is my experience, and that of two neighbouring covert-keepers, though I have read that there are different opinions about the matter.

A few years ago, to judge by letters and articles which were published, one would have imagined that the badger was nearly as extinct in these islands as the dodo; they may be scarce in some districts: in this part of Ireland they have been vastly on the increase for several years, but, like other night workers, are not believed in because seldom seen.

It is quite possible if the artificial earth bears no signs of use that it is faulty in construction and is *damp*. If this be the case, and you cannot devise some system of drainage to rectify the defect, it should be dug up at once as totally useless, and another constructed. An efficient method of draining should be carefully considered, to save expense, for a properly constructed artificial earth is not made for nothing.

When a new covert has to be laid out, most careful consideration is required as to its situation; and in these days the most important point is that it shall be absolutely free from trespass. When it is possible to place the covert within the boundaries of some

staunch supporter of the Hunt, that, of course, is best, because there no trespass need be feared. There the vixen may safely attend to her domestic duties, and there, if "certainty" be possible, should be the certain find. But no matter where the gorse covert is placed, it will require attention and cutting down in due season. And here I may remark that in reality there should be no cutting *down*; the cutting should be done with an *upward* stroke of the bill-hook. and the cut should be clean. Cut down, and you splinter the wood. I have known one covert to be completely ruined by that treatment.

Nothing makes a better covert than gorse at its best, but when hollow there is no place that foxes more dislike after a windy night, with the stems rattling and the foliage blowing open. The odds against a find ought to be long; and yet, we shall be asked, what substitute can be found to equal the evergreen plant?

Where the land is wet, osiers form dry lying; pampas grass, privet, laurel, have all been tried; perhaps a mixture of anything that will grow on a poor soil; some of the newer conifers, to be ruthlessly "headed" when they attain three feet six inches might succeed. An artificial covert need not be large, as those who have seen the late Mr. Jack Gubbins's famous little nook at Bruree know well—it is just as carefully looked after by the owner of Prospector, by the by—and when sheltered from wet and wind, if quiet prevails, a fox does not want much more if his food supply be tolerably handy.

I have never seen a covert entirely composed of privet, but I have been told that in suitable soil it forms an excellent shelter, and affords capital dry lying. Where the surface of the ground is uneven and laurels can be "laid" over pit-like depressions in the land, they make a lasting and most excellent covert, and only require occasional clipping when they grow high to make them furnish at the bottom.

To those whose lot is cast in some favoured grass countries, where a seven-acre spinney is considered a wood, the sight of such sylvan expanses as Salsey Forest, or the Badminton Lower Woods, brings dismay. But let them go and see how the Grafton hounds can rattle out the former stronghold, and how the Duke and his pack can make the foxes in the latter cry *Capevi*, as old Jorrocks has it, and they will confess to having witnessed work both quick and beautiful.

To the minds of some sportsmen, even in these days, there is a certain spice of artificiality about the neatly enclosed and carefully planted square of gorse, so dear to the galloping division, and so suggestive of the quick find and breathless five-and-twenty minutes. I confess my own leaning for the methods of Mr. Coryton and his hounds dragging up through the heather to a regular Dartmoor "Hector." There is no doubt that a wild woodland is the place of all others wherein to view and admire the "fierce intelligence" of the pack as they examine each likely haunt, and the very sound of their busy feet among the dead leaves, and the snuffing of

their nostrils, awakens the stern joy, the hunting instinct so strongly implanted in the human breast. For a picturesque, but most thoroughly faithful, description of a woodland find, read Whyte-Melville's run with the Pippingdon hounds in *Tilbury Nogo*, or his chapter on "The Provinces" in *Riding Recollections*. These bring the scene and action before one as the writings of that lamented author alone can do, and we feel, as we read, his enthusiastic pleasure in the wild sport he so vividly describes. Fond as we may be of the gorse enclosure, the opening note, the rattling view holloa, and the sight of the pack pouring from the covert, the other is the real thing, depend upon it; and the twenty minutes' "coffee-housing" outside the gorse, without a glimpse of a hound, contrasts badly with the enthralling sight of a gallant pack of hounds drawing up to their fox in a picturesque woodland on a good scenting day.

These words call up thrilling recollections of long ago as I write them, and I see again in imagination a lovely dingle in the West country—a little wooded glen or strath. A trout stream ripples along between steeply sloping banks, clothed thickly in places, sparsely in others, with holly and hazel coppice. Now and again the valley widens, and stately silver firs spring from the flat greensward beside the stream, which babbles on to join the Tavy. Above, on the right bank, gallant old Squire Trelawney, of Coldrennick, leads a goodly throng, and cheers the pack beneath him as they spread and try for a touch of a fox. In a wide glade a little badger-pied bitch becomes very busy,



PUPPY SHOW AT COOLLATTIN.
Showing the Old Hounds to the Company after Lunch.

and returns again and again to a mossy patch of tender green. Two sages of the pack think her proceedings worthy of investigation, and feather steadily along in her company up by the laughing burnside. "He's been there," says the Squire, and looks at his watch. They brush through a cluster of fern, and then the little bitch flings up her head; but before her musical note reaches us on our height, hounds are pressing to her from left and from right. Splashing across the water to get to her, tearing wildly down the banks to her, racing up from behind to her, turning short back to her—the heroine of the hour. Once more she flings her tongue alone, and then such a clamorous chorus arises as the whole pack sweep along by the stream below us, and Boxall cheers.

"Have at him there, forrad, forrad!" and, with a sparkle in his eyes, the old Squire looks over his shoulder and says, "Best keep moving pretty briskly, gentlemen." The valley narrows and darkens, and thicker grow the firs, and thicker still where the stream turns at right angles to the north. In our meadow above we cut off the angle and again see the striving pack below us, and hear the "gallant chiding" echo and re-echo as the glen becomes wider, and rocks and boulders hang over the stream. Our horses snort and strain at the bit as we canter merrily to such stirring music. A grove of firs is in front: we crash over the rotten fence and pass between the trees into a small green paddock. Beyond frowns a high, straight bank, coped, it appears, with slate; no gate, but, lo! yonder a hog-backed stile. What a sweet sensation it is to hop neatly over timber!

Fainter sounds, the hound music on the left. More trees, but beyond them, stretching upwards to the sky-line, a purple sea, and far in front of us something like a flock of white birds flitting over its surface. Enough!

Pardon! The pen took charge, and got fairly away with me; for here have I, who have just referred you to Whyte-Melville, been presumptuously inflicting boyish recollections for the last ten minutes. They were flying minutes, though—that stile was a rasper. And what Rudyard Kipling says of the Himalayas so say I of Dartmoor—that if the smell of it once creeps into the blood of a man, that man will at last, forgetting all else, return to these hills.

CHAPTER XIII

ON ARTIFICIAL FOX-EARTHS

THE most sacred spot in the old covert lay about thirty yards from the gate, which opened upon the middle side; a narrow path branching from the ride led one in a few steps to a cavity in the ground, at the end of which cavity a small stone-faced aperture, half-hidden by tangled weeds and grass, revealed itself.

“It looks like the mouth of a drain!” said my small boy to his tiny sister after his first visit to the covert; “but” (in a tragic whisper) “it really, really is—THE FOX’S DEN!”

The little path led on straight past the cavity I have mentioned for ten yards to another similar excavation, wherein was situated the other mouth of the earth, which was shaped exactly like the letter A, the plan of artificial earth which found most favour with our great M.F.H.; and my comparatively slight experience has led me to believe that this is the most satisfactory pattern I have seen.

To describe more particularly this particular earth I must mention first that the old covert is situated in the corner of a perfectly flat field of twenty acres, and, the ground being on a dead level, the mouths of

the earth had to open into the pits or cavities I have described.

From each mouth a covered way, lined, as to its sides only, with stone and covered by flags, ran straight till they met a small circular chamber of "lie-by" at the apex of the A; each of these shafts was twenty yards long, their mouths twenty yards apart; and half-way from the mouth to the apex, the crossbar of the A, a tunnel of similar construction, opened into them.

I recently assisted at the uncovering of one of these earths, which had become blocked up in one of its passages; and I may note here that this damage was evidently the work of a badger, fresh proof thus being furnished of the injurious effects caused by the presence of that animal in a fox covert.

The entrances were smaller than the rest of the shafts for two feet inwards from the mouth, and the flooring of these two feet was of flags, to prevent enlargement of the mouth, but this was the only part of the "floor" thus flagged. The walls of the shafts were solidly, if roughly, built of stone, and the shafts varied in width from nine to twelve inches, while their depth was eighteen inches. In the centre of the crossbar of the "A" a small lie-by, or cave, turning towards the apex was made—this being two feet wide, semicircular in form, and well roofed and lined with stone.

Although when we opened the earth we found that the right-hand shaft of the earth was *closely packed with clay*, and also the right-hand part of the crossbar—packed so closely that it appeared as if it had been "tamped" down by a pavior—yet there was no defect

to be observed in the walls, roof, or construction of the earth until we came to the "lie-by" in the crossbar of the "A." Here we found that some of the heavy stones that lined its walls had been picked out and the cave then enlarged; all the clay which had been excavated having been thrust out into the passages I have mentioned and packed away there. Only the badger could have done this, and here were the remains of the grass bedding which the old rascal had, as usual, provided for himself.

I do not think the badger had made a very long sojourn in the covert, but, after having spoilt our fox-earth, had soon taken his departure, and when the rabbits increased in the covert they had also found their way into the earth. Wonderful, indeed, is the burrowing power of the badger, wonderful the power of those short, muscular limbs, the strength and sharpness of those formidable claws.

Those who have watched the animal in captivity know in what an incredibly short space of time he can stow himself away underground if undisturbed; and I once had the opportunity of seeing the wild animal at work on a moonlight night, or rather of watching the fountain of sand that was thrown up unceasingly, till the worker became aware of our presence. It was one of the most uncanny sights I ever witnessed, for the moon shone full upon the sandy bank in the middle of the black wood, and the "geyser" of sand seemed to be propelled from the bowels of the earth by some mysterious and supernatural agency.

It will be readily understood how safe from maraud-

ing terriers is the inhabitant of such an earth, for the lithe, supple fox, by running through the cross-passage, can make a proper fool of a dog without bolting into the open air, or perchance into the sack placed in readiness by other foes awaiting him outside.

I have seen earths of other design, some shaped after the manner of the letter L or T; but if there is no natural hole to be adapted and improved upon, and all the work has to be done by man, I think the A pattern will be found very simple of construction and most secure.

Where natural burrows are regularly used by foxes as breeding earths, it may be found necessary to face the entrance with stone and reduce the size of the aperture, for it is obviously important to make it impossible for a dog of large size to draw the earth.

The situation of the earth in the old covert was, of course, selected by our chief, whose advice was "not to have an earth placed far from a ride, so that the rest of the covert should be disturbed as little as possible when the earths were being stopped at night." This, I am sure, is correct, and the hint is worth remembering, for no little detail should be neglected by the owner who wishes to have his covert described as "a certain find."

Although I fear no other gorse will ever be quite so dear to me as that old covert, which, distant but three hundred yards from my front door, shone a veritable "Field of the Cloth of Gold" in May. Yet it is by no means my ideal fox covert. The dead level of the situation, the close-trimmed thorn hedge and post-and-wire fence which surrounded three sides

of it gave it an air of artificiality which I deprecated always, in spite of the wonderful reputation it gained for holding foxes. More to my taste is the wild bit of broken ground, the little glen through which runs the tiny stream, the rocky hillock, whereon the fir-trees seem to find a natural footing, or the punchbowl-like depression among the grassy hills, on whose slopes we gather to watch the white sterns flickering and the dark bushes shake.

Surely there is pleasure to *sportsmen*—I speak not of riders—in the quest of the wily animal, in the actual search for the “little red rover,” who may be here to-day but away in the next parish to-morrow; and, to my mind, the ideal covert is one in which we can watch something of the fierce intelligence of the pack as they try for him, while if the surroundings be picturesque that pleasure is surely enhanced.

Not a mile, as the crow flies, from my writing-table is a little covert which, I am happy to say, at this moment contains a litter of foxes, and has a delightfully natural and sporting appearance, though the fields around it are flat enough. How many, I wonder, of the hundreds who have seen it drawn have ever been inside those low, thorn fences? Trees grow within their bounds and among the thorn of the fences; thus it looks like an ordinary square spinney, such as that the train flits by many times in half an hour when speeding through the English Midlands. In reality, however, the land within those fences is on a gentle rise, and the gorse grows strong round thorn and chestnut and hazel. There is an abrupt little fall in the ground some fifty yards from the southern fence,

and here was once an old quarry or sand-hole, the bottom of which is now carpeted with velvet turf, at the present moment somewhat stained and trodden down. Three chestnut-trees have their roots down in this deep hollow, and their umbrageous foliage sweeps the ground, covering the face of the steep northern bank, in which are the mouths of the breeding earths. The vixen did not bring her cubs out there, though, but in a rabbit burrow under the tree close by; she has "moved them in," three of them—such fine little chaps, big as large cats already, and just as agile.

We made a party to watch them two evenings ago—three ladies and myself. The ladies sat concealed under the branches of the chestnut opposite the earth, taking up position about 7.30 p.m. The midges, they say, were—well, "too awful for words," but they—the girls, not the midges—behaved nobly, and in less than a quarter of an hour were well rewarded. For they saw the sharp little snout and twinkling eyes of a cub appear at the mouth of the earth just opposite, and presently he stole out on the grass, not twenty feet from their delighted eyes. The midges by this time had reduced me to profanity, and caused my retreat, but I learn that this cub was "quite the sweetest little darling." His brothers, too, were quickly on the scene, but at first they seemed suspicious of the presence of strangers. There being no more, however, in the ladies' gallery, while perfect stillness and silence prevailed, the cubs were emboldened to begin their gambols, in which the wing of a fowl played some part; and eventually one little rascal charged across the grass and nearly jumped

into the lap of one of the watchers, which disconcerted him so horribly that he rushed back to his lair, spitting and snarling. He quickly came forth again, and the fun recommenced, but soon the gloaming was changing to the mirk, the clock in the village spire a mile and a half away boomed solemnly the hour of nine. I thought I heard the distant bark of the vixen, and, stepping forward from the bank above the scene of frolic, a stick cracked loudly under my foot. Tam o' Shanter's burst of applause in Alloa's auld haunted kirk had not a speedier effect in putting an end to the revelry; all three cubs turned and bolted for earths "like all possessed," and the watchers found difficulty in struggling out of the well-fenced covert, so dark had it become before they reached the hedge. However, some of the party having never before seen cubs at play were more than delighted with the entertainment provided by the covert, and all agreed with me that here was an ideal fox-earth.

Disused drains in the vicinity of old buildings are very frequently converted into breeding earths by the foxes, and I recollect one evening being surprised to see four cubs disporting themselves under some large trees about forty yards from the back of my stables. As I approached they vanished, and I then discovered a hole communicating with an old drain which had once led from the stables to the ditch of a farm road. Beyond this farm road was a triangular plantation of larch and fir covering about a quarter of an acre. Here the cubs remained all the summer, removing in the autumn to the old covert. Hounds, as usual, found every time they drew it that winter,

but we noticed that the foxes invariably ran up past the house to the grove behind the stables, where, it is needless to say, they found no open door. The hole which led down into the old drain was in a little-frequented spot in a patch of ground completely covered to the depth of some inches with dried beech-leaves, and had never been noticed before; it had probably been made years ago, was lightly stopped with clods of earth and forgotten. The old drain formed a snug and very complete earth when this postern door had been cleared; but it was curious that I never found any feathers, bones, or fur, or any billets of foxes near the drain, though they were to be seen in abundance in the little grove on the other side of the farm road.

No more delightful description of a fox's earth, or, rather, of a "head of earths," is to be found than Charles Kingsley's in the famous paper, *A Concert in a Pine Wood*. May I be forgiven for quoting it?—

"Beneath yon fir some hundred yards away standeth, or, rather, lieth, for it is on dead, flat ground, the famous castle of Malepartius, which beheld the base murder of Lampe, the hare, and many a seely soul beside.

"I know it well: a patch of sand heaps mingled with great holes amid the twining for roots: ancient home of the last wild beasts. And thither unto Malepartius safe and strong, trots Reineke, where he hopes to be snug among the labyrinthian windings, and innumerable starting holes of his ballium, covert way, and donjon keep. Full blown with self-satisfaction he trots, lifting his toes delicately and carrying his brush aloft, as full of cunning and conceit as that world-famous ancestor of his, whose deeds of unchivalry were the delight, if not the model, of knight and Kaiser, lady and burgher, in the Middle Age. Suddenly he halts at the great gate of Malepartius, examines it with his nose: goes on to a postern: examines that also, and then another and another,

while I perceive afar, projecting from every cave's mouth, the red and green end of a fir-faggot. Ah, Reineke! fallen is thy conceit, and fallen thy tail therewith. Man has been beforehand with thee, and the earths are stopped!"

Besides the artificial fox-earths in the coverts, I have seen several earths of olden days in County Kilkenny, which were made by the famous Sir John Power when he hunted that country. These he called "decoy earths." They were placed away in the open country to induce foxes to run over a particular line to seek their refuge, and several of them had the reputation of being very successfully planned. These earths, I believe, were left unstopped in the very early part of each season, and some remain altogether unstopped; but "on the day of the hunt" Sir John would station an emissary to keep "sentry-go" over these earths and head the fox from them. There was an amusing story told of a lad who sat on the bank with his legs dangling over the mouth of such an earth and fell asleep, to be rudely awakened by the leading hounds worrying at his calves, for the hard-pressed fox had slipped in between them.

Some who are now hunting in Kilkenny may remember the finish of a run on the Coppengagh Hills, when the fox went to ground in what appeared to be a drain. Spade and pick were called for and mining began, but an old countryman standing by advised them to desist, saying it was "an old earth made by Sir John lined with brick and covered with slate, and I dunno what all," and that they would be a week in digging him out. Drain-pipes have been used in England for the same purpose, but I have not

personally seen them successfully worked. However, both for "decoy" earths and main earths a friend tells me that they answer admirably.

In spite, however, of all the care and trouble that has been bestowed upon artificial earths, my experience tells me that foxes, however much they may frequent them, do not *as a rule* actually bring out their young in them. Why this should be I know not, for I have often known a vixen carry very tiny cubs into the artificial earth, cubs that could not have been many days in this wicked world—a vale of tears to them, perhaps; but, as Mrs. Gamp says, "They was born in the wale, and must take the consequences of sich a sitiuation." These cubs *were born* in some holes in a railway embankment, past which the trains thundered eight times a day, while linesmen were constantly at work close by. The foxes were brought out there again this year, and a strong litter, too, but they have been moved of late, and I trust have gone to stock "the old covert" once again.

But what charm lies in this favoured spot? It has been "permanently stopped" over and over again; stones have been poured down the holes, whole masses of the bank have been dug out; the holes fairly plugged with rabbit-netting and covered in. But sooner or later the place is always "cleaned out" again. There is no shelter near, not a tree close to the spot, nothing but the high, gravelled embankment, with the "iron road" on one side and a large field of light grass land on the other.

But this fondness for certain breeding earths is a

well-known characteristic of the fox family, and several most unlikely places in this neighbourhood are annually "cleaned out" by the vixens. Some of these are not considered safe or desirable by those interested in the preservation of foxes, and tar, petroleum, and many cunning devices of the earth-stopper have been used to make them abandon these haunts for good and all. These efforts may seem successful for a time, but sooner or later Madame Vixen will return to her old quarters for "the interesting event."

Perhaps it is that with all our care and trouble we have not yet discovered how to make an artificial earth that shall entirely satisfy the most cunning of our wild animals. If we could do so the safety of the cubs would be much insured in a country where woodlands of any size are scarce, and most of the foxes are found in gorse coverts.

CHAPTER XIV

VARIETY IN HUNTING COUNTRIES

THE late Mr. George Lane Fox, one of the great pillars of the chase in the nineteenth century, whose love of real fox-hunting was hardly equalled by any of his great contemporaries, used to be rather severe upon those who forsook their own county hounds and went to what Mr. Jorrocks called the "Cut-me-downs" for their sport; and Whyte-Melville, who thoroughly sympathised with the great M.F.H. in this matter—in principle, at least, if he did not carry it out in practice—expresses it delightfully in the pages of *Market Harborough*. "After all," he writes, "notwithstanding her irresistible attractions, we cannot follow Diana every day of our lives, and surely it is wiser and pleasanter to take her as we want her amongst our own woods and glades and breezy uplands, and pleasant shady nooks, than to go all the way to Ephesus on purpose to worship with the crowd. Mixed motives, however, seem to be the springs that set in motion our human frames, and if Care sits behind the horseman on the cantle of his saddle, Ambition may also be detected clinging somewhere about his spurs."

Men certainly hunt from "mixed motives," and the great Squire of Bramham, above mentioned, delighted in the reply of one of his followers, a visitor who took up his hunting quarters within the confines of the Hunt, to an inquirer who asked why on earth he didn't "go to the grass." "I don't *eat* grass," was the answer, "and I prefer the hospitalities of the plough. The man whose idea of fox-hunting is simply riding fast over a country is never the one to "prefer the hospitalities of the plough," and if an honest notion of his ideal sport could be obtained it would probably be found to be something of this sort: A very level, sound, grass country of large enclosures, none less than twenty acres, divided by stiff fences, with the take-off firm and good and the landing smooth and capable of being jumped by a horse in his stride; a blazing scent and no check till the "beastly crowd" is well shaken off, and then only of sufficient duration to "give a horse his puff"; time limit, thirty-five minutes at most, preferably ten minutes less, for if the pace is really "top-hole," and the fences "pretty useful," it gets to "second-horse time" about then.

A delightful programme, no doubt; but, fortunately, some of us say fox-hunting at its best is not like the pictures we see in the print-shop windows, and if the above were to be the unvarying fare served out to the true fox-hunter, surfeit would very soon overtake him, and he would become horribly bored and disgusted. He would miss what are to him the real joys of the chase—the endless diversities of the pastime, the beautiful working of the hounds, and their wonderful instinct called forth by difficulties

presented during the pursuit, by the nature of the country, the stain of cattle or sheep, the heading of the fox by the plough-team or labourer, or the running of a road by the beaten quarry, and his twisting course, that betokens the end is near.

To some, perhaps, the most wholly delightful moment in a fox-hunt is when a hit is made by some favourite hound, or a happy cast by the huntsman when "we're all in a muddle, beat, baffled, and blown," and the pack, swarming together like bees, drive forward with such rapturous cry that the man must be made of strange material who does not catch the contagion and feel an electric thrill shooting through the very cockles of his heart.

The requisites laid down by a great sporting authority as being "essential to a real good fox-chase" were "hunting sometimes, running sometimes, and racing into the fox at last," and when these essentials are obtained we all go home happy; and it would be a very long time before a repetition of such pleasure became monotonous; it certainly has never been my lot to have too much of it—but one never can tell! "Of sitting, as of all other carnal pleasures," said the escaped Puritan galley-slave, "satiety cometh at the latest."

Of great grass countries and great crowds, I believe satiety cometh to most after middle-age, though there be many who battle on to the end; and a great sportsman has been heard to declare that if all Meath were like the famous Dublin country he would not hunt in it. It is that great variety which is common to almost all Irish countries that makes hunting in the



Photo]

[Lafayette, Dublin.

THE LATE MR. JOHN WATSON.

Master of the Meath Hounds, 1891-1908.

(Died, aged 56, 1908.)

Green Isle so especially delightful; and this variety is certainly very pleasantly manifest in Meath, where on a Friday the sportsman may find himself racing over the level expanses of pasture in the neighbourhood of Dunshaughlin, let us say, and next day twenty-six miles to the north he may be watching the Meath bitches rise and disappear over the grey stone walls that intersect those light, grassy uplands that look down on Virginia Road Station.

This variety of country endears it to the sportsmen who dwell therein and “never have two days consecutively in the same sort of country”—one of the advantages a settler in the glorious Limerick district claimed for it when I was there lately. Though I am by no means in sympathy with the peripatetic fox-hunter who wanders about in search of sport, “shifting his pitch” from year to year, yet I most thoroughly enjoy a day or two in a new country; but, as a friend puts it, “if all England and Ireland outside the towns were one big rolling patch of Leicester grass, divided by bullfinches of the regulation pattern and distance apart, a visit to a distant country would be robbed of more than half its present charm; and hunting would certainly be much more commonplace if all the countries were exactly alike, if precisely the same methods were in force, and if the packs were of a dead level standard of quality.” Those who have never hunted outside the crack countries may be excused for believing that sport elsewhere must be tame and feeble, so much has been written in praise of these favoured districts; but the mistake is a great one, as has

often been conceded by good sportsmen from the Shires when they retire to the provinces.

No doubt great speed and much leaping of high fences and wide water appeals to the imagination, and the Midlands of England have frequently been selected as the scene of many a doughty deed performed to please a lady in the pages of a novel; while the writings of "Nimrod," describing "the lawless burst, the wicked riding, the cracking of rails, the Siberian waste of grass, and the submersion of new coats and gallant souls in the Whissendine," drew great attention to the district wherein these heroic incidents took place. Whyte-Melville, too, has put before us unequalled descriptions of sport in the same country; but true sportsmen will follow that author with greater delight when he takes us into the provinces with charming Kate Coventry or Uncle John, or down into the West with Tilbury Nogo. Surtees and Charles Kingsley also were able, years ago, to please the genuine fox-hunter, though the authors never wandered into the "Cut-me-downs" with their heroes; but brave old Peter Beckford, by the wonderful earnestness and fervour of his well-chosen language, has been able to eclipse all others in his absolutely truthful description of a fox-hunt.

A wonderful performance, in truth, is Beckford's famous picture of a fox-hunt. Doubtless he drew from memory, and I suppose that Dorsetshire, and probably Lord Portman's country, was the scene of action. A wonderful performance indeed. Not a word about the horses, the dresses, the dreadful leaps, the broad brook, and the horrible fall, and yet

sustained and thrilling interest to the sportsman from the find. "Hounds and hunting," these are the theme, and, with skilfully interpolated little gems of Somerville's poetry, Beckford has given us a classic whose merits have received justice from authors who were no sportsmen. It is inimitable; it could not possibly be improved upon; and yet when we read it over very carefully we shall see that our author could hardly have appealed to us so well had he been describing a run over Leicestershire, for many passages we most admire would have lost their truth.

The writings of Beckford and Somerville may have lost some of their popularity in the present age, and if this is the case it is much to be deplored, for they are more attractively instructive than any others, and we hear yearly increasing complaints as to the necessity of instructing many of the folk who come out with hounds in what has been perhaps somewhat fantastically termed the "Noble Science of Fox-hunting."

From the writings of Surtees we can learn nearly everything about the actual pursuit of a fox that can be gathered from a book; but there is so much to amuse in his novels, and a sense of the ludicrous is so quickly aroused, that many minute descriptions and details connected with the chase are, I fancy, often overlooked by the reader, who does not expect to find pearls of wisdom dropping from the jolly mouth of Mr. Jorrocks, even when he "lecters" from the platform or soliloquises when pounding along on the back of "Arterxerxes"; nor does he look for con-

summate knowledge of the huntsman's art when such amusing knaves as Soapey Sponge or Facey Romford proceed to handle a pack of foxhounds.

In Beckford's *Thoughts upon Hunting*, however, and in the poem he quotes so freely, will be found all that the ardent young sportsman can desire to read for his instruction alone, and if a love of the picturesque and what there may be of poetry in the chase appeal to him, he will find delight in these pages, and will learn from them that many pleasures are to be found in most unfashionable countries, and that the glory of the gallop is by no means the sole pleasure of fox-hunting, nor the one that we enjoy the most frequently.

Some would have us believe that a beautiful landscape is thrown away upon the fox-hunter, who is supposed to dislike the sight of anything in the shape of a hill that rises higher than the Hemplows, and whose ideal country is one that a horse can easily gallop across. As a matter of fact, however, the majority of fox-hunters have, I find, the keenest appreciation of the beauties of Nature in all her varying moods, and rejoice in them exceedingly.

"It is true," wrote an early Victorian author, "that among the five thousand who follow the hounds daily in the hunting season there are to be found, as among most medleys of five thousand, a certain number of fools and brutes—mere animals, deaf to the music, blind to the living poetry of nature. To such men hunting is a piece of fashion or vulgar excitement, but bring hunting in comparison with other amusement and it will stand a severe test."

Those who are conversant with the works of the most famous authors who have written upon the subject of hunting cannot fail to be struck with the unaffected admiration for the picturesque which constantly displays itself in the descriptions of the chase. Charles Kingsley, in the opening chapter of *Yeast*, and in many another page, Whyte-Melville and Surtees in most of their works, give us delightful glimpses of charming English scenery, and the chapters in which these descriptions appear are, I notice, beloved of hunting men. To quote again from our enthusiastic "Early Victorian": "How delightfully fine the run along brook-intersected vales, up steep hills, through woodlands, parks, and villages, showing you in byways little Gothic churches, ivy-covered cottages, and nooks of beauty you never dreamed of, alive with startled cattle and hilarious rustics."

I once ventured to make comparison between fox-hunting in Ireland and the sport as it is carried on on the other side of St. George's Channel, and to set forth the advantages claimed by Hibernian sportsmen for their native isle. It has lately been pointed out to me by a lady, whose experience and knowledge is unquestionable, that I omitted to claim for Ireland one of the charms of fox-hunting on this side: to wit, the beauty of the scenery, and the picturesque variety of country one rides over in many of the very best of her hunting districts. "Whereas," says my correspondent, "in England, when we come upon really beautiful scenery in the hunting-field, the country generally becomes unrideable, or nearly so."

Now, while admitting that the picturesque is met with in every county in England, and much that has beauty in its own quiet way, I think it must be allowed that most of the crack countries are not celebrated for striking or romantic landscape. Some exceptions there are, no doubt—and notably in the North Country—which suggest themselves readily enough; but in Ireland there is scarcely a grass country in some portion of which the background is not filled by some blue mountain or noble range of hills, while river scenery of the most enchanting kind is very frequent—scenery that, to my mind, is enhanced by the sight of a pack of hounds, with their scarlet- and black-coated followers moving swiftly along by the wondrous green margin of the sparkling water.

Naturally, in Ireland as in England, the most romantic scenery is to be found in countries that are unrideable; and though the Kerry beagles have a fame of their own, there are no foxhounds to be found in that loveliest of Irish counties, where mountain, lake, and forest forbid the use of the steed. In the neighbouring county of Cork, however, fox-hunting prevails in the midst of scenery, wild and very beautiful in the west, where Miss Edith Somerville reigned over the West Carbery; though at times hounds pursue their quarry relentlessly over a country which looks only accessible to a goat, followed nevertheless by horses. To the east of the same county by the banks of the Irish Rhine, the C.C.H. have many a gallop along the lovely Blackwater Valley, and I can never forget the evening we ran a fox to ground at old Strancally Castle—a picturesque ruin that looks as

if it were placed there to complete the romantic beauty of that wonderful reach of the glorious river. Further up the same river those who have seen a run along its banks from Modeligo for the first time, will afterwards have nearly as much to tell of the views they have seen as of the Hunt itself, and following up the stream into Duhallow territory we come upon charming river scenery in the neighbourhood of Mallow and the Avondhu kennels. Nor is the valley of the Suir, to the northward of those towering Knockmeildown Mountains much less beautiful, and there are times when its beauties burst upon one out hunting in the most unexpected manner. It was either from Castle-morres or Rossenara that we saw the Kilkenny hounds slip away after their fox one muggy, misty day, when Mr. Langrishe had solemnly prophesied that there would be a scent to satisfy all of us—only, perhaps, he put the matter before us with greater intensity ! They got away over the hill into what is known as the Wynne's Gorse country, and there was certainly no doubt about the scent or the pace. The line of big green fields the fox crossed was ideal, and it was voted a charming country. The parti-coloured patch that moved so smoothly over the surface of these fields seemed to show up their greenery, the sound as of joybells that rose from it stimulated the lucky ones within hearing in their efforts to keep near it ; the fences were sound and fair, and mostly bare of all growth of thorn, and would have been voted small in some countries.

A charming country ! And yet, had no hounds been there that is a featureless and uninteresting bit of

tableland enough, and one that, under other circumstances, would have been voted monotonous. The hounds raced and the horses pulled, and all went well. The trees of Booliglass were well away on the left, and still the hounds raced, but the horses pulled no more. The thick atmosphere prevented me from taking any landmarks, though I think the M.F.H. knew every field he leaped into, but at last we found ourselves upon stony ground; hounds checked, and the mist cleared away, and then, as it lifted, rose an involuntary "Oh!" such as one hears on illumination nights when the many coloured sparks burst from the rocket over a cockney crowd. We were looking down on the lovely valley of the Suir. Bessborough, among its splendid timber and sweeps of greensward, lay, so it seemed, at our feet, Castletown Woods to the right of that again, and the well-wooded vale towards Carrick, Kilsheelan, and Clonmel. Through the valley ran the shining river and beyond it and opposite to us the Tower Hill of Curraghmore and the Carrick Woods with the Comeraghs towering behind them, while wood and mountain framed the picture to the west as far as the eye could reach. We had a rare gallop up to that point; but though I remember it well to the check, the view from the stony hill is all I can tell of the finish without reference to the diary. I shall never forget that "Oh!"

It must be understood that the countries I have recently mentioned are what are known as countries which are chiefly under pasture, and which commend themselves from a rider's point of view to our notice. The country from which I write has in itself no great

claims to natural beauty (save in the actual valleys of the Barrow and Slaney—two rivers by which it is watered), were it not for the glorious mountain views of the Mount Leinster range and the more distant Wicklow Mountains, which we never lose, no matter in what part of the district we are hunting; and in winter, when snow sheets the tops that rise to an elevation of more than sixteen hundred feet, one cannot well imagine anything more beautiful than those distant views. But, as was remarked before, almost every Irish view has its share of these. Lord Fitzwilliam's territory presents a combination almost unequalled of moor and mountain, woodland and pastoral plain. Kildare, with its stout foxes running up into the sweet Wicklow Mountains; Waterford, with the dark Comeraghs dominating the cream of its grass; Wexford, with the southern slopes of the Mount Leinster range rising high above the sporting lowlands; Louth, with exquisite views of the Mourne Mountains—upon all one might descant at length, which should prove wearisome. And Royal Meath, deady flat though most of what Sam Reynell called its "boundless plains" may be, has views of the Dublin hills and possesses uplands above Tankardstown and over far Loughcrew, commanding most glorious panoramas. Galway, with all its wild wealth of grass, may, perhaps, be the exception; and the sadness which the grey walls seem to lend to the landscape gives a sterile effect to much of a country which I have seldom visited.

Then, quite apart from the attractions of lovely scenery, I often wonder if the favoured individuals

whose lot it is to pursue the fox over "the cream of Leicestershire," have better fun for their money than those who take their pastime in what are disparagingly termed "rough countries." At first sight, it would appear that comparison must be absurd, and the notion of contrasting the pleasure enjoyed by the equestrian mounted on the ideal steed for the flying countries and careering over "oceans of grass," with the scrambling mode of progression familiar to the sportsman in a rough country on a nag that the other could "gallop rings round" seems too ludicrous for words. And yet when I wrote of "fun" just now, I confess that doubts began to assail. Simply from the rider's point of view, of course, there can be no question about the matter when all goes well, when hounds are not over-ridden at the start, when no railway intervenes just as they have begun to shake off the crowd, when no fresh fox jumps to save the life of the hunted one, when no wire crops up to cause disaster and delay. But such things do happen, and happen pretty frequently, too—so frequently, in fact, that I find some of my friends beginning to sigh for a little wilder and less conventional sport.

My recollections of a run in a rough country some years ago may perhaps serve to raise a smile. What, I wonder, did the "swell" from the grass of the English Midlands—for one was out that day—think in his heart of hearts of the quaint scene at the cross-roads where we met? Ten individuals on horseback all told, waiting for the hounds in as bleak a spot as you shall find in Southern Ireland; a group of country folk round them and a single side-car with two ladies on

board, squeezed in close to the fence to get out of the bitter wind. But, "Here come the hounds!" their Master with a single whipper-in in attendance, and four or five more horsemen. There are fifteen couples, not very evenly matched, you will say; some very little bitches, and one or two dog-hounds that dwarf them considerably; but the bitches are very smart and shapely, small though they be, and, despite their unevenness, there is a varmint wear-and-tear look about the pack which rather impresses one. The M.F.H. and huntsman is impressive, too, in his way, and looks like business. You augur well from his reception by the country folk, with several of whom he is soon in earnest, low-toned conversation, in the course of which two more horsemen turn up.

"Law enough," at last says the Master, and, turning his horse, a procession, which consists of one lady and twenty mounted men, moves off to the base of a high and rocky hill. Banish from your thoughts, oh swell from the Midlands! all recollections of Cream Gorse or Ashby Pasture, for "here we go up, up, up," breasting at first the steep slope of the high conical hill, with short, slippery grass under our horses' feet—grass which changes all too soon to weird-looking heather and patches of low-growing Irish furze. At last, when our saddles are inclined to slip over our horses' tails and the wind shrieks past our heads—recumbent though they be on the necks of the steeds—we reach the top (seven hundred feet high), and find ourselves among strange boulders of red-coloured rock, where wretched, stunted fir-trees struggle for existence among great hummocks of coarse, yellow grass with

short furze and brown heather intermingled—the fox covert. Before we have fairly adjusted ourselves and our saddles we can hear, despite the whistling of the winds, that hounds have found a fox and are hard at him, and we become aware that the summit is already tenanted by quite a crowd of country folk, who have been awaiting the arrival of the pack, and have no intention of quitting their coign of vantage as long as a horseman or hound is visible in the plain below. With extraordinary keenness of vision they will view a fox both in covert and far away from it, and their intense excitement become contagious. The Master's cheer and the occasional touch of his horn is supplemented by yells and rushes of the foot-people, when the fox is viewed stealing along a path beneath the stunted firs, or showing himself for a second among the rocks; and many strange shouts of encouragement are directed at the hounds. The M.F.H. bears himself with Christian fortitude; he is used to their ways, and beyond a "blast all that bawling, boys!"—very fervently delivered—keeps his temper and his breath for his horn and hounds.

At last an ear-piercing yell, followed by a more scientific "view holloa," sets us all off in hot haste to follow the tracks of the Master. Crouching under the firs, we escape decapitation, and scrambling over half-hidden boulders and half-tumbling over many a tussock of tufted grass, we at length find ourselves on the edge of what appears to be a ghastly precipice. But there is a path (or an apology for one), and the huntsman is slithering down, so we harden our hearts and follow. The countrymen, be sure, are there to see

him go, and throughout the dangerous descent we hear such cries as "Look at 'um now down thro' Mick's ley field!" "Isn't he a devil?" "Mind him now, across the praties below," "He's a riglar (something) of a fox."

At last—oh, joy!—we are beyond the worst of the gradient, and can see hounds cross a small field of yellow grass below us; and there we also find ourselves in a few seconds more. The lower fence of the little field appears simply a high mound of large stones piled up along its length, but with an amazing rattle and clatter of stones we surmount this difficulty. We have the M.F.H. in front of us, his whipper-in is on the right, and we have followed him as closely as etiquette will permit down this terrible descent.

The pack is slipping along now, and their eager, excited notes come back up the hill to us with a mocking challenge, as it seems. Now we drop into a "boreen," so rough and stony that we doubt if progress is quicker in this little lane than on the gorse-covered slope we have left; but we peg along, and when the walls are low we catch glimpses of hounds ahead and slightly to our right, and when they are high—why, we hear the merry music and know our own course is correct. But a gap from the "boreen" leads us into a tiny field, in time to see hounds disappear over a high stone-faced bank, and the surface of the ground being now only slightly on the decline, we hug ourselves with the notion that the hill is at last left behind, and that we are fairly "in for a run." Our boreen has also put us on terms again with the pack, and the "skirmishers" who did not make the ascent now are not one whit better off than ourselves.

There is a merry flash past a little farm, an awful drop on to a broad, white road, a steep descent into the bed of a shallow stream, and a climb up the further bank of the same, which takes the steam out of the nags as they struggle uphill to a yellow woodland, through which hounds hunt with resounding cry. Away then over a high stone gap at the end of the ride, on to an open bit of rough moorland, where we pick out sheep tracks and paths, for our progress is hindered again by the low Irish furze which crops up among the heather. The fox has run one of these paths, we may be sure, and "hounds all after him go" in a longish string just now, and not saying quite so much about it as before. The visitor from the Midlands is well to the fore, and going his own way; his face, slightly flushed, wears an aspect of supreme content, and carries not the suspicion of a sneer at the rough country. "What a rare good fox!" he says, "and how they do dust him along!"

Good fox he is, but he is not half done with yet. Slanting now across our track runs a broad, grey wall, and there is a gap in it in front of hounds, who are leaving us behind a bit; but in the very gap they cluster and pause. Then a curious thing occurs. Hounds pour through the gap and spread themselves over the rough ground beyond, all but two of the smallest bitches; these nip at once on to the wall, and, silhouetted against the western sky, run fast along the top of the wall, throwing their tongues shrilly at intervals. The pack swings round, and running by the side of the wall, press on with confidence in the couple over their heads, and perhaps catch a whiff

or two of the scent that maddens them, for a note goes up also from among them on occasions. For more than a quarter of a mile this queer and most interesting work continues, till the wall leads us into a fir wood, where there is strong covert of the sort described before under the trees. This wood also crowns a hill, but a low one, and the savage cry that goes up from among the trees makes us press to the far side for a view. See, "there he goes!" down by the far side of the rocks! But these woods are full of foxes; is he our hunted one? It is not easy to decide, for the heather hides his brush and half his body; but here come the hounds, their hackles erect from poll to shoulder like the mane of a butcher's cob. Yes! I think we may bet on that vanishing brown shape below being their rightful quarry. In the open the heather carries a rare scent, and faint though that of a sinking fox may be, they swoop down after him, but ere they have gone a mile are springing frantically about below on the rough ground, where they have stopped. "Whoop!" He's in here, in a hole among the rocks. "Whoo-whoop!" It was an hour and thirty-five minutes, and has seemed half a lifetime. No check from find to finish, and the stranger in a wondering sort of way says, "Gad! I believe it's about the best hunt I ever saw." But what's this? "Tally ho! Tally ho!" Out jumps the fox from the shallow cleft in which he had taken refuge, and once more goes for the fir wood up on the hill above us—a bad move, poor fellow! For straggling hounds above us, attracted by the noise, come leaping down and meet him; he turns, and the

turn is fatal—they have him now, and a struggling mass wobbles down the hill with much stifled growling and worrying. “Whoop!” again—and twice as vigorously delivered,

Now the obsequies! The lady must have the brush, but the mask will cross the water and hang in a Midland hunting-box to remind the owner of a day in a rough country.

CHAPTER XV

FOX-HUNTING TYPES

THE VETERAN—THE MAN WHO HUNTS TO RIDE—THE
MAN WHO RIDES TO HUNT.

“I’ve lost my grip, I’ve lost my go,
So now I ride in Rotten Row.”

I MAKE no apologies to the noble lord who wrote the above lines for quoting them. They describe the reasons given by an old friend, one of the best welters who ever crossed an Irish country, for his abandonment of the chase; but the pity of it is that he should have deprived himself of many years of enjoyable recreation, and left untried the numerous pleasures of fox-hunting that can still give delight even when—

“The beard is grey on the cheek and the top of the head grows bare.”

It may appear difficult perhaps to one who has always been *aut Caesar aut nullus* to realise that keenest pleasure and never-ending amusement fall to the lot of the sedate, elderly gentlemen on the

clever cob or good family horse, who seldom fails to put in an appearance at the covert-side. He has had quite the best of us all even thus early in the day; his perfect-actioned steed has given him no annoyance on the way from the meet by undue freshness; there has been no boring at the rein, no excitable curvetting. Therefore, with unruffled demeanour he has been able to hold pleasant converse with his friends, nor when the covert is reached does he allow any consideration of what lies in the immediate future to disturb his equanimity or interfere with his real pleasure in seeing hounds try for their fox.

He knows the reason why young Rapid grows silent and preoccupied when the deep, sonorous note of old Rummager proclaims that the thief of the world is afoot, and why he sidles along up the fence towards the narrow hunting-gate; but the selfish anxiety for a start, and mad hustle and jostle to get well away, are things of the past for our Senior. His anxiety now is that the fox shall get a chance, and the hounds get well away, so that we all may have our fun, each in the manner it pleaseth him best. Not for him now the eager emulation to drop into the front rank and stay there, "good fellows to right and left of him, but not a soul between himself and the hounds," he has done it in his day, and now he appreciates the ecstatic pleasure of his successors, and likes, if he can, to watch them play the game.

He can say with Charles Kingsley in his famous "Concert in a Pine Wood"—the best bit of hunting that ever was penned: "Let it suffice that I have

in the days of my vanity drunk delight of battle with my peers far on the ringing plains of many a county, grass and forest, down and dale."

To sportsmen all, to friends of my youth, who, because they think they have lost their "grip and go," now confine their equestrian pursuits to Rotten Row, or betake themselves to the Riviera, I, as one of the ancients, would say, "Return to your old familiar winter quarters. Even in a winter like the present the skies are clearer than in London, and the rain at least as cleanly. What pursuits have you whose delight has been in—

"'The steed's brave bound and the opening hound'?"

What pursuits have such as you by the shores of the Mediterranean? Better the mud from the dog-cart wheels on the way to the meet than the dust from the motor-car on the Corniche road, the cheery jog to covert than the stroll on the glaring Promenade des Anglais!"

Here is the ideal mount for you! He is 15·0 $\frac{3}{4}$ hands, his shoulders are long, his girth is deep, his feet are as flint, his legs as of iron; he can flex those hocks of his in trot and canter, and, "mounting you like a castle," can step away with you at a walk an honest six miles an hour. His mouth is light, and he will turn from no fence you put him at should vaulting ambition possess you to-day, but will jump it deliberately, with safety and activity.

Up with you, then, and jog on once more to the well-known field that overlooks the little glen with

the furze-clad banks, and the dark Scotch firs growing where the sides are steepest.

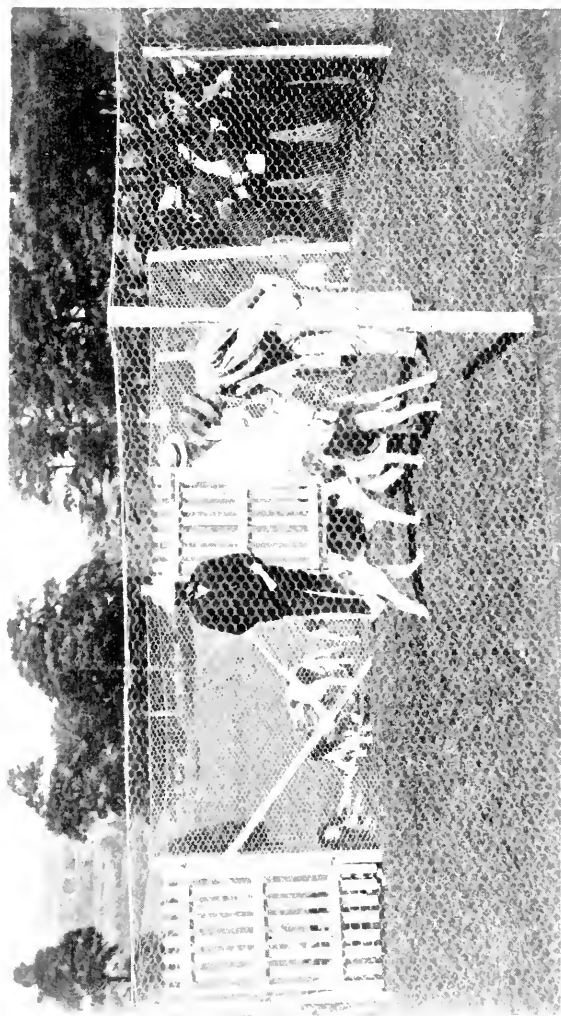
“ ‘Tis the place; and all about it, as of old, the magpies call,
Boding evil to ‘the Lad.’ . . . ”

Hark! What a piercing note! Sounds almost like a hound in pain, doesn't it? There it goes again! Reminds you of old Starlight, does it? Well, old Starlight has been dust this many a year; but that was Cowslip, a grand-daughter of hers—see! there she is on the other side, on the rocky slope where the gorse grows so sparsely. There never is a scent there, you remember, and not another hound can speak to it. There, she shows again! Same colour, you see—red and white, like her grand-dam. How like the old bitch even from here! Mark the extraordinary way she lashes her stern.

There are some followers, though; look at them working hard in her tracks! But they can't quite own the scent. Aye, now they have it! now they can press him a bit! I reared that black bitch, and she's a wonder. Wait till you see her in the open!

The fox, did you say? Where? Ah, I thought the sight of him would fetch you. Aye, there he goes again across the rocky bit. See if he crosses the stream below. No! What? Yes; by Jove, you're right. Yonder he goes! He's away!

What are those fellows doing pressing on down there? Why, poaching a start! Well, they can't head the fox now, but they may foil his line before the hounds come out. They must learn better, no



JUDGING AT EARL FITZWILLIAM'S PUPPY SHOW AT COOLLATTIN.
(Judges: Commander Wm. B. Forbes, R.N., and Mr. A. Pollok, M.F.H.)

doubt, but "boys will be boys." Our huntsman is down there now, and there go the hounds. No! he hasn't quite the note on the horn that the old man had—but who has? We must be moving though, on through the next gap, and follow the cart-track down the hill and cross the stream. What a cry comes up from below! You need no spurs, I see. Splash through the water, and peg up the little green lane, with the low stone walls on either side. The fox passed up the field to the right of it. I told you so, and here we are alongside the hounds.

Look at them now, they have fairly got hold of the scent; see the two dark-coloured bitches that lead them—like greyhounds on a hare, aren't they? How they do drive along! That's a hard-riding chap coming up on the bay horse. How cleverly he jumped that stone-faced bank; good sportsman, though! he will do no harm! Here comes the Master! Looks happy, doesn't he? I should think he had all his hounds on. Did you take the time when the fox broke? Too excited, were you? Well, I have it—ten to twelve by my watch; remember that!

Where are we heading for? Well, there's a biggish wood about five miles in front of us, and a lonely country all the way; we're bound to see something of them if they run that way. There's a road in front of us that our lane comes out upon, and once over that road it's safe to be a run, for, bar accidents, they won't be over-ridden to-day. How well they run together, don't they? But the black bitches still lead, and how's that for a cry? What is there like that continuous musical clamour that seems to rise and

fall? A peal of bells; aye, the old, old simile—we can find no better.

Look out, now! Here we are at the end of the lane, and out upon the broad high-road. Hark to the Master's "Hold hard!" He knows what's in front of them. But look at the hounds coming out on to the road; how intense their eagerness; how changed and strangely savage their appearance. Here comes a double-distilled fool bursting on to the road after them, and dropping right in among them, heedless of the Master's objurgations; and look to the left along the road at the crowd that are coming up best pace. Aye, hold up your hand and check them! Anyhow, we can do that much good. But hark to Relic along the road to the right there, and see how the pack scour after her. There is good Grove blood in her, and her forbears could all carry a line along a road, though none like her. "Lord Galway for ever!"—how she does spin along! "Age cannot tame" the good old hound. One day a week she comes out, and rests the remainder of the week, and she never comes out but she makes her mark.

"Mrs. Macadam" they call her, and when dust is on the road or through stain of horse and cattle she will hustle along the highway and keep her tongue going, too. She has two daughters out, and you'll see them close to her now, I'm sure. Aye, there they are—Rival and Rally. But now the old lady stops, and the pack swing over the fence to the left, for the Master's cap is off, and listen to his "Yoi; over, over, over!" We can watch the men now. How the Master's old brown settles himself down, almost "sits

down to be" before the wall, and then hoists himself over; while another fellow takes a circle round the road, nearly knocking half a dozen people down in order to get a run at the fence, at which he bungles horribly. See that lady, how she gets her horse collected, has two short strides, and flips over. But we haven't time for more! Bustle along the road and fling open the next gate you come to on the left; there's a long line of gaps beyond it, and we shall be on the high ground on the right of hounds. Well done! Now we can shove along as hard as we can lay legs to the ground. Isn't it splendid going? What a glorious sensation even to an old 'un to send a free-going horse along over such turf as this, light, old, upland grass that has never been broken up, with the keen air whistling past one, and that jolly cry of hounds and the indescribable sound of the chase ever in our ears.

There they go! "Headies, how they run!" as old Jorrocks would say; but there is a "tail" on the field, and no mistake! What a string! Look at the little group in front—bay horse is leading, turning neither to right nor left, but four men are in line close behind him, and taking the fences just as they lie before them, rising and dropping like clockwork figures, yet gaining not an inch on the pack. We, too, have a following up here. Look round and see what a line of horsemen are after us! Stick your whip under that pole now, and lift it off the top of those stones in the gap before us. Neatly done, in truth! Now away down the slope towards yonder trees. That is the wood I spoke of, and the road we

will reach in a minute leads round the top of the wood, and then runs through the bottom. Oh, to be there and view the fox across! Here we are now, with the arching trees overhead—and how calm and still all nature seems down in these sylvan depths after the “delight of battle on the ringing plains”! But hark! “Through bramble and brake the echoes awake;” they are hard at him still, and coming this way! Let us press close up to the trees on the left.

Ah! there he goes across the road and into the low side of the wood. With drooping brush and tucked-up belly he steals across at a foot’s pace. Have you forgotten how to holloa? By Diana, no! That was a good one, and has told. Listen to the horn, and the Master’s cheers. Here come the pack, and the Master crashing down through the underwood with them. “Where did he cross?” No need to reply; the hounds rapturously tell him that. “Is he long gone?” “Only just in front of them.” “Forrard! forrard!” and the trees close after our jovial huntsman. No need to follow him; stick to the road, and gallop down through the wood, taking the first turn to the right when we come to the cross. There they go now, across the little valley below the wood, but their heads are up in the bottom, and, though hounds swing round, they come back puzzled. What can have happened? Ah, see that evil-looking collie coming down the road towards us with his tongue hanging out and his sides heaving. No doubt he has coursed our fox, and it would be well to make the M.F.H. aware of it. Our information decides his cast, and in five minutes they are running harder

than ever, but soon begin to twist and turn very decidedly, and we can see a lot of their work. Soon the chase ends: ends with the death of the fox, or at the open earth which has saved his well-earned life—what matter? It has been a good run, and what a lot of it we old folk have seen!

“’Tis triumph all, and joy” to finish in sight of hounds the end of a fine pursuit. Nor does our pleasure end here. We have to talk it all over on our way home, and again over wine and walnuts after dinner, maybe to measure it on the ordnance map in the smoking-room after that again. Then the humours of the chase spring to mind; the croppers we viewed, the funking and the craning; the decorative legends of Jones, who arrived ten minutes after the finish; also Smith’s imaginative anecdotes as to the powers of his “little brown horse.” We notice little talk about the hounds among the young ones; but we can have our say about their doings, for we can assuredly claim to have seen “more of them than most.”

Well, has it been a pleasant day? I think so! A healthy one? I am sure of it! “Toil just sufficient to make slumber sweet,”—toil that will but prolong the life even of an old ’un, for no men preserve their mental and bodily faculties so long as those who are constantly in the saddle, and do not let a passing ailment put an end to their riding. How numerous are the proofs of this! Think of Mr. Robert Watson, M.F.H., riding over the biggest country in Ireland, horn at saddle-bow, in his eighty-fourth year! And read in Colonel Anstru-

ther Thomson's *Reminiscences* of the pleasures that remain to a man who is fond of the chase even unto patriarchal age! That book alone, with its happy, genial tone, should be sufficient inducement to all hunting men to stick to the sport as long as Providence gives them strength to stick to the saddle, "while panting Time toils after them in vain."

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The Man who Hunts to Ride is to be found, I think, in every hunt in His Majesty's dominions, and is present at almost every meet with every pack of fox-hounds.

There is no mistaking the keenness with which he pursues his sport; which is certainly to him one intensely exciting, containing, as it does, a considerable spice of danger to himself—in many cases also to the hounds he patronises, and occasionally to his fellow-mortals. "Bruiser" yeapt by some, by others "thruster," both epithets sufficiently describe the manner of his progress. He comes out to ride straight and hard, to be turned by no fence, to go as close to the hounds as his horse can carry him, or as long as that horse can last. But it does not necessarily follow that he will over-ride hounds, unduly press them at a check, or otherwise misconduct himself; for, if he has been any length of time at the game, he knows better than to spoil his own fun. Though he probably would die sooner than say so, however, he means to "have the best of it" if he can, and intends to let no man ride between himself and the pack when they really run hard.

Now, he who goeth forth with this intent may, I think, be fairly described as the "Man who Hunts to Ride," for though his pleasure may be enhanced by the sight of the pack carrying a scent at a fast pace over a stiff line of country, and though their cry may serve still further to boil up the excitement within his breast, yet the fact that they are engaged in the pursuit of a cunning and resourceful animal, and that he is supposed to have come out to watch them do it, does not come home to him at all.

A retired sabreur, well known in the hunting world, a very fine horseman, who has won his share of glory between the flags, once had the honesty, not to say hardihood, to confess to his friend, the late Master of the Meath Hounds, that he "loved the ride," but "didn't profess to understand or care for the tally-ho business!"

Not many forward riders, however, are so candid as our friend, though I know full well that the number of those who share his sentiments is legion. Still, I suppose it would be unfair to suggest that the members of the legion are not fond of fox-hunting.

"Why don't you always go out with the stag-hounds or draghounds? They'll do just as well," I once asked a friend—now, alas! with the great majority—who had expressed similar sentiments.

"Oh no!" he replied, "I like foxhounds best. One meets such lots of good fellows, one sees such fun, and I like riding about all day—particularly if I can get on a different horse occasionally. Besides, you never know when you will have a dart, and it's

all the jollier if it comes unexpectedly. Now, with the 'goat' one comes out later, has a gallop, goes home, and that's all about it." This was a military steeplechase rider of great renown, who had steered a Grand National winner.

Verily the votaries of the chase differ in the manner they enjoy its pleasures!

It may be thought by some when one looks round at a large assemblage of horsemen gathered together at a favourite trysting-place that it should be an easy matter to classify the different types of fox-hunters present; but to my notion this is not the case. Look for your "bruisers" or "thrusters." In all shapes and sizes, of all classes, and, I am almost tempted to write, of all ages, shall you find them throughout the land.

Appearances are deceptive in this, as in other quests. Yon tall, lathy figure carrying that lean, resolute head with its strongly marked line of eyebrow and square, determined chin, surely that must be your "thruster," if ever there was one? Note, too, the accurate fit of his superlative boots and breeches, the beautiful cut of his double-breasted, swallow-tailed scarlet, and the length of his terrible shining spurs! "A rum 'un to follow, a bad 'un to beat, I'll be bound!"

"Not worth a row of pins to ride, my dear sir!" replies Mr. Asmodeus, who knows all about every one. "But see that pale, half-starved looking, cadaverous youth, with the light hair and the hat on the back of his head; he's a holy terror to ride, if you like; turns from nothing, jumped two strands

of wire on top of a bank last day he was out, and the coped demesne wall at Kilballysmash on Saturday last!"

We may be sure that when strangers appear at a meet the huntsman, especially if he be an amateur, casts a wary and inquiring eye upon them; appraising them in his own mind, and inwardly settling (with a view to further notice) who will be a "likely fellow to press them at a check." I have before now received the confidences and apprehensions of a huntsman on such an occasion, and have lived to hear him confess his mistake at the end of the day.

As to the age of the Man who Hunts to Ride, has it a limit? Mr. Robert Watson once declared that no man who smoked was worth—well! not much—to ride across country after he was sixty; but in this, I think, the veteran was for once mistaken, bearing in mind that his friend and brother M.F.H., Sir John Power, who enjoyed a long cigar to the end of his life, was a rare good man on a four-year old when he was seventy, and fairly "set" a large field of horsemen with the Heythrop hounds at that age. Sir John, however, like Mr. Watson, and the hero of the following tale, was one of those who "ride to hunt"—a species that survives rather longer in the field than the other, I am inclined to believe. "Age cannot tame, nor custom stale" some fox-hunters, that is certain.

I recollect years ago having a hunting friend to dine with me at Boodle's. At an adjoining table sat a party of delightfully cheery, fresh-coloured

youths who were discussing the moving adventures by flood and field of a run in which some of them had participated. "It was a devil of a place!" quoth the principal spokesman; "bad downhill take-off, a stiff-looking rail set well away from a widish ditch, and the hedge was as high as a house—a 'you couldn't see over, you couldn't see through' sort of thing—and Lord knows what on t'other side. But one couldn't help feeling sure there was something. I turned away; wouldn't have it at any price! So did Blank and Dash who were up, when down comes an old chap on a big bay, never looked to right or left, but sailed over the lot. I give you my word *he was forty-five, if he was a day!*"

My friend and I found we were looking at one another very hard, for we both had to own to a more advanced age, but it transpired that the hero of the tale was the late Lord Connemara, who was then, I believe, approaching his seventieth year.

It must not be imagined that the Man who Hunts to Ride is naturally a jealous rider. On the contrary, he may be the readiest in the field to pull up and help a friend, or even a stranger, in a difficulty, catch a loose horse, get down and open a gate that cannot be jumped, and, in fact, prove himself to be the good fellow he so often is. But he has come out to have his hunt, which means that he is going to follow a pack of hounds wherever they go. These hounds are to race at a great pace over the country, he hopes, and he is going to stay as close to them as he possibly can; that is the game, and a glorious one it is, he thinks—better than polo, if possible; and, if there is plenty of fencing,

better than the fastest tussle for first spear after the grim, grey boar. You talk to him of scent! Oh! he hopes with all his soul that there will be a good scent, or, if they must go slow, that they will go over a strongly enclosed country with as few gates as possible in the line.

Perhaps in the mind of the Master all such enthusiasts are labelled dangerous. They think nothing of hounds or hunting, he reflects, so they do not anticipate the sudden turns, the abrupt checks that the man who rides to hunt would almost instinctively have apprehended. And such knowledge is never likely to come to them till they begin to care for hounds and the actual science of hunting.

Not long ago I heard a huntsman exclaim, apropos of one of the straightest of youthful pursuers: "I ought to have slanged him, I know, but I hadn't the heart to do so; he is such a capital boy, and means no harm. He comes out for his ride, and where hounds go he intends to go too!"

When, however, the Man who Hunts to Ride carries any jealousy into the field with him, he must at once be labelled dangerous, and it is hardly conceivable to what lengths jealousy will carry some men when out hunting. A farmer told me not long ago, when talking of a certain notoriously jealous rider, that he saw him, when well in front of the field at the time, ride bang among the stooping pack at a sudden check and crack his whip. They rode home together, and he asked the jealous one what on earth possessed him to do such a thing, and spoil the finish of a fine gallop in which he had gone so well. "You needn't say anything about

it," was the reply, "but the fact is the old horse was beat, and I don't think could have jumped another fence!" This is a perfectly true story, but, of course, an exceptional case, and I am happy to say that this individual retired from the chase some years ago.

"Duck under, Jack! Duck under!" screamed Lord Scamperdale to Mr. Spraggon, who was souse overhead in a clayhole. "Duck under! You'll have it full directly," added he, seeing Sponge and the rest coming up. This was jealousy pure and simple, of course—jealousy of the stranger who dared to cope with the members of the Flat Hat Hunt. And of all forms of hunting jealousy the dislike of seeing a stranger in a leading position in the field may be perhaps most natural; but what shocking bad form to evince it! Some who have been notably fine sportsmen in all other ways have yet not been free from this taint of jealousy; indeed, certainly three of the best men to hounds I ever saw in my youthful days were jealous as girls. They were all "forty-five if they were a day," but I feel sure they never had any enjoyment out of a run unless they were carried bang in front. For hounds two of them cared nothing, and openly said so, while one of this pair gave them very little room, and, though a good supporter of the Hunt, was always in trouble with the Master.

The Man who Hunts to Ride is to be found in all ranks of society. "Go along, Jimmy!" said a late renowned M.F.H., whose language was always tolerably incisive, to a well-known hard-riding candidate for Parliamentary honours who was jumping off a road a bit too close to the pack in the Master's opinion—"go

along! That's right! Kill all the hounds, and break your own blessed neck! Then we'll have no more fox-hunting and no Liberal Member for Blankshire!"

The hard rider whom I mentioned above as riding hounds off the line was a corn merchant, and the late Captain Algernon Moreton, who used to regale me when a boy with stories of Lord Fitzhardinge (Sir Maurice Berkeley) and his huntsman, Harry Ayris, said that the sharpest thorn in the old sailor's side was a hatter from Gloucester who was slightly hump-backed, and upon whom the choicest flowers of the noble M.F.H.'s nautical vocabulary were freely sprinkled.

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In strong contrast with the man who rides hard across country for riding's sake must be placed the Man who Rides to Hunt—the man who sets out in the morning intent on seeing hounds find their fox and hunt him, and on obtaining as good a view of the performance as the animal he bestrides will enable him to do. His pleasures and anxieties, which give zest to the pleasures, begin early in the day; nay, may we not say that they began the night before? For he is a thorough devotee of the chase, and would never dream of going to bed without taking "a look at the night," setting the barometer, and giving it a final tap.

When wakened in the morning he is all anxious for a peep out of the window to see if it is a hunting day, and betrays a certain amount of fussiness till home is left behind and he is fairly under way for the meet. He would not be late for any consideration whatever. When he arrives he is keen to get a look at the hounds,

knowing many of them by sight and name, and notes the absence of any celebrity of his acquaintance with regret, and is soon in conversation with the Hunt servants or the M.F.H. himself.

As to his horse, such a man seldom rides one that cannot "get him there," though he may not be fastidious as to appearance or particular as to whether the animal will pass the vet. or no, and he gets on his back without any sort of idea of showing off his horsemanship, but simply with the intent of keeping within such distance of the hounds as will enable him to watch them to his own satisfaction, no matter how far or how fast they run.

This is the matter-of-course programme with him always, and if he fail to carry it out—and the best will sometimes fail—most dire will be his disappointment; though jealousy of other riders, ambition to be alone with hounds, or the desire to jump unnecessary fences never crosses his mind. Not that he does not enjoy the stirring sensation of pace, or the "feel" of the elastic spring that carries him over the obstacles. What man can help doing that? But these are only accessories to his pleasure, to the delight he feels in being able to see the gallant pack racing along over the greensward after their quarry, while their melodious cry causes a strange electric thrill to shoot through his frame. He is well aware that he is then having the very quintessence of the fun; yet should the pace suddenly slacken, his pleasure will hardly be lessened when he draws rein to watch them stoop for the scent, to note how busily each hound is working to carry the line; how, opening and shutting like a

fan, the pack press forward, swarming like bees, and driving furiously onward when they catch a stronger breath of the "tainted gale."

It is now that the Man who Rides to Hunt has the advantage over the "thruster" pure and simple, who begins to find the thing a bore if his horse is still fresh, and would be glad to see a fresh fox jump up in view of the pack—an event which would cause much distress to the other pursuer, who, having enjoyed the ride, is now delighting in the *Hunt*.

I remember once seeing hounds leave a covert close to the gate at which they were put in a few seconds after having entered it. They scoured away, and ran so fast and straight that in a few minutes I heard a voice exclaim, "Gad, this must be a drag!" "If I thought it was," replied one of the best of sportsmen, "I'd pull up on the spot!"—and he meant it too. But I fancy it would have made little difference to the other, who was one of your go-along-there-are-three-couple-of-hounds-on-the-scent style of gentleman.

"Be with them I will," may be as much the motto of the Man who Rides to Hunt as of the other. He may not be a finished or beautiful horseman, but must carry a heart bold and determined beneath his waistcoat, and his eye must be quick. The chances are that he is served by his sportsmanlike power of observation, and his knowledge almost amounting to instinct, of the way to get in and out of a field so as to lose no ground.

"There is," writes Whyte-Melville, "an intuitive perception, more animal than human, of what we may call 'the line of chase' with which certain sportsmen

are gifted by nature," and this intuitive perception seems to be possessed by the men who ride to hunt in a greater degree than by others.

I wrote just now that the pleasures of leaping large fences satisfactorily are fully appreciated by the Man who Rides to Hunt, but must qualify the statement somewhat, for I have known several of the species who, if they thought about the matter at all, considered the fences approvingly, because they served to give room to the pack, but otherwise regarded them with dislike or as obstructions sent by Providence, and therefore to be dealt with in as cheerful a spirit as possible. To these men the usual chatter after a run about the "awful places" that have been jumped and the vivid descriptions of the obstacles seem foolish in the extreme; and I have heard pretty short answers given by one whose thoughts were of the catching of the fox during every minute of the gallop, when asked how he got over the Ballyscatterem double or some other dreadful impediment. He said to himself, no doubt, "Now, what the deuce had the jumping of the double to do with the way those beauties, now baying round their huntsman, dusted that fox—the way they stuck to him through all the difficulties that threatened to defeat them? All that fellow can think of is the beastly fence that bothered him."

Certain it is that the men who ride to hunt talk mighty little of the fences they encountered unless they have been defeated by them, when possibly they may have a word or two to say. "Where do they find these terrible places?" the late Lord Wilton is reported to have said, "I never come across them."



Photo]

[Lafayette, Dublin.

THE LATE MR. ROBERT GRAY WATSON.

Master and Huntsman of the Carlow and Island
Hounds for 59 Years.

(Died, aged 87, 1908.)

There are men who ride to hunt with every pack in the kingdom. My own slight experience of hunting in the West of England leads me to imagine that they have a larger supply down there than elsewhere, though I suppose that the North Country runs them close. On the Irish side of St. George's Channel this brand of sportsman is not so frequently found, though it is said that the late Master of the Carlow and Island Hounds (Mr. Robert Watson) had educated a pretty large field of horsemen to ride without hazarding their own sport, and to share in some degree his own sympathy and interest in the work of the hounds. But men of Mr. Watson's calibre and extraordinary personal influence are rare indeed, and the exuberant animal spirits and general excitability with which Hibernian sportsmen have been credited are not altogether conducive to the power of taking pleasure out of a slow hunting run.

This mention of what I have seen effected by Mr. Watson brings one back to the reflection that the Man who Rides to Hunt must have been educated to the business; and this matter of education is in the present day declared by many Masters of Hounds to be very urgently required. Very recently I received a strong letter upon the subject, in which the writer declared that it would soon not be possible to carry on the sport in particular districts where so many people who came out displayed entire ignorance of what they were about, and whose sole idea of fox-hunting appeared to be to ride over the country, and on all occasions to keep as near to the hounds as possible. Now, the Man who Rides to Hunt will, from

the beginning of the day to the end of it, be always careful of the hounds; he will give them room at all times. On the road when going from covert to covert he is sure to be within sight of the pack, but never "treading their tails off" in the culpable manner one so often sees. Huntsmen like their hounds to spread about on the road when it is clear, and have no wish that they should be herded along like a flock of closely-packed sheep. At the covert-side your sportsman is keen to watch the behaviour of the pack just as they are thrown in, knowing certain symptoms in their demeanour which at times will tell pretty surely that they have a fox inside the fences. When he is found, our friend who rides to hunt becomes "dumb as a drum with a hole in it," to use Mr. Sam Weller's simile, or at most will hardly elevate his speech above a whisper, but his eyes are alert and he has lots to think about, and it will be generally found that he has secured a start. When hounds check, his voice will never be raised in noisy clamour, nor will he move his horse about, but he watches with intensest interest every movement of hounds and huntsman. He is hunting the fox in his own mind, and it is of this check and such-like incidents of the chase that he will talk when all is over.

The mischievous practice of turning off the road when going from covert to covert, and schooling over the fences alongside it, will never be committed by him, it is hardly necessary to say. The "frolic home after a blank day" is now, as it ought to be, a thing of the past, for in these days unnecessary riding over fences is much to be deprecated; and, if hounds are

cold-hunting slowly, it is much more sportsmanlike to go a considerable distance out of one's way to pass through a gate in the fence than to follow them over it. The huntsman and servants may do so—it is their business—but no one need go after them. This may seem absurd to some who read these reflections. If so, let them ask the farmer over whose land they are riding what he thinks about it.

It must be remarked that among hunting folk the use of the verb “to ride” means, in their parlance, to ride hard across country. “Is he any good to ride?” asks Brown of his friend Jones, with a jerk of his head towards poor Robinson, who passes by. “Not worth a row of pins!” replied Jones truthfully, according to his rendering of the word. Yet Robinson, though “a trifle delicate in his pluck,” as the Irish whipper-in said, may be a finished and powerful horseman. To the uninitiated it may seem strange that many of the men, who, both in the past and present day, have seldom been seen to ride over a fence, have yet done most to further the great sport of fox-hunting by their princely support and their practical knowledge of hunting in all its departments, but especially in the matter of hound-breeding.

So much, however, is talked and written on the subject of fox-hunting by those whose knowledge is superficial, that non-hunting folk take their ideas of the chase from the highly coloured descriptions in modern novels, the perpetual chatter about jumping of fences, and, to quote Mr. Jorrocks, from “Mr. Hackermann’s pictor shop in Regent Street: There you see red laps flyin’ out in all directions, and ’osses apparently to be had for catchin’.”

CHAPTER XVI

FOX-HUNTING TYPES (*continued*)

THE MAN WHO HUNTS FOR AIR AND EXERCISE—HIGH-WAY FOX-HUNTERS—THE MAN WHO HUNTS BECAUSE IT IS THE THING TO DO—THE FOX-HUNTER ON WHEELS.

LET me take first the Man who Hunts for Air and Exercise. Here he is at the meet! A type that you may, for once, single out. Nearly always of a jovial, good-humoured disposition, the Man who Hunts for Air and Exercise is also, I have observed, one who takes up a certain amount of room in the world, whose appearance bespeaks goodly nourishment of the corporeal frame. No "lean and hungry Cassius" this. Rather a jovial Falstaff, with hearty greeting and merry jest on tongue. A type that is welcomed by all and could ill be spared.

We are not to suppose that this type of fox-hunter always labels himself as above. On the contrary, he would probably be very much surprised if told that he was considered to come within that category. Certainly, he never deems himself a hard rider; but

to be told that he only came out "for air and exercise" —perish the thought!

And yet there are, we notice, signs and tokens which serve to place him unmistakably, and the weather is the first of these. Just a little bit of a feather-bed sportsman is our friend, for—

"When the morn comes dim and sad
And chill with early showers,"

it may come to pass that we miss his cheery presence at the fixture; though, if the day clears up, very likely he will turn up smiling somewhere in the neighbourhood of the second draw.

On a fine morning it is a pleasure to be overtaken by him on the way to the meet; for our friend generally drives, and very comfortable he looks in fur-lined coat, with the softest and thickest of rugs lapped round his goodly person. He hails you with a pleasant bit of chaff, and almost always has a bit of news; for, early in the day though it be, he has managed to get a glimpse of the morning paper, and to wade comfortably through his correspondence while he breakfasts; for he is not the man to be tempted from his daily routine by any undue excitement or flurry because there's a day's hunting before him.

Perchance he whizzes by with a laughing "good morrow" in the most up-to-date of motor-cars; but, be his vehicle driven by petrol or drawn by horses, it is pretty sure to combine comfort with dispatch.

When he exchanges his conveyance for a hunter he is not going to be less pleasantly carried. His groom

knows better than to have his horse "a bit above hisself," and the animal steps away quietly but springily under him, dropping his head confidently to the bit.

His acquaintance, it is hardly necessary to say, is a large one, and he appears to be on terms of friendship with every one he passes, while his attention to the different members of the brigade of Amazons testifies to the gallantry of his disposition.

No matter the reasons for his appearance in the hunting-field, he is usually a stickler for orthodoxy in the matter of dress, and generally affects the scarlet livery of the chase, though there is never anything in the smallest degree *outré* in his costume. But we may notice that the scarlet never seems to become of the purple hue so familiar in our own wardrobe, and the strongest sunlight fails to bring out those lines down the glossy hat—like traces of time on beauty's cheek—which tell of struggles with the holding thorn.

By him the commissariat department is seldom neglected; he is prone to carry at his saddle-bow a huge receptacle for fluids in a hunting-horn case—an objectionable form of flask, perhaps, but which has often been forgiven when its generous owner has passed it over for a good pull on a cold day or on a weary road home.

When the assemblage breaks up into groups at the covert-side our Air-and-Exercise Man is pretty sure to be a central figure in one of the merriest, and the laughter that is heard from that particular group is not seldom provoked by a tale from his repertoire,

which is large, and includes always some amusing novelty. Like the bursting of a shell, a sudden sound scatters the groups in all directions! The new story is forgotten at once—and perhaps for ever. The supreme moment has arrived to each one. “What will he do with it?” That is the question.

Our friend, only very slightly ruffled, preserves his outward calm. He has no sort of intention of racing for yon narrow hunting-gate with the score of enthusiasts who are doing their best to get there first. Still less has he any idea of cramming straight at the impossible-looking fence beside the gate, like the gentleman whose horse’s tail is already at such an ominous elevation. Not a bit of it! But he is going to have his gallop, nevertheless—just so much or so little of it as seemeth good to him.

So he flows steadily with the tide, and passes easily through the gate, unsquashed, unkicked, uncursed, and, getting well down in his saddle, is carried smoothly across the first field, his horse going collectedly and catching just the right hold.

When he reaches the fence five people or fifty may have jumped it; that concerns him only if they have lowered the leap a little for him. His horse is a good jumper, anyhow, and if lots of folks are in front of him, why, there are lots more close to him on either side, and some behind! Lots of company, in fact; and among them, no doubt, some of his own kidney who are possessed by no overmastering excitement, and can chaff and jest as they ride along even more effectively than at the covert-side or on the road, for the incidents of the pursuit are sure to furnish material for

their good-humoured banter, and the half-serious exclamations of advice and encouragement which they exchange.

The Air-and-Exercise Man not infrequently places himself, or is placed, in charge of a bevy of juveniles or of a young lady, but is not quite so happy in this capacity, which is more in the line of the severer order of sportsman, he thinks ; but those who are under his charge will have no cause to regret it, for they will be sure of a safe and amusing ride with so genial a cicerone.

When the end of the chase has come, and our friend has joined forces with the happy and still excited band who were with hounds at the finish, it is amusing to notice how some of the regular front-rank men, without any source of triumph in their demeanour, but as a matter of course proceed to describe to him the details of the last few minutes of the gallop. With real interest, tempered by philosophic calm, he receives their information, and heartily congratulates the M.F.H., and all present within hearing, and may, perhaps, remark : " Ah, well, we did very nicely, too ! "

It is hardly necessary to explain that the Man who Hunts for Air and Exercise has distinct fondness for a horse, and takes an interest in all appertaining to him. If he did not do so he would seek his exercise in some other fashion ; and I have observed that he is sometimes one of the chief racing men of the hunt. In the spring of the year his opinion is frequently asked as to the Grand National, and is received with much respect. In the Point-to-Point races he takes

great interest; he is usually one of the committee, and often a prominent official connected with the gathering, which he nevertheless affects to hold in a certain good-humoured contempt as being not the real thing—"neither flesh, nor fowl, nor good red herring."

He is often also an indispensable functionary at the Hunt Ball, where he is in great request, though he may not be seen at his best "on the flure," and probably regards dancing as fatal to the safe digestion of his dinner. But he will have a word to say about the supper and the wines, and is indefatigable in seeing that the dowagers shall miss nothing of what he regards as perhaps the most pleasurable part of the evening's entertainment; later on he will be sure to gather a few friends in the supper-room, when they will be equally sure to drink "Fox-hunting" in some vintage for whose wholesomeness he can vouch.

For he is a fox-hunter—of a certain type, and not a bad sort of type, either. He is popular with all, and, though he may not do very much in an active way to further the sport, yet he "promotes the harmony of the meeting," and makes no false pretences. It was told of a noble M.F.H. of bygone days in the West of England that he gave very startling and original advice to a follower who, when asked "What the devil brought him out?" replied that he "came out for air and exercise." But I do not think that the type I have been trying to sketch can often be accused of doing any harm, and generally the M.F.H., beginning perhaps by good-humoured toleration of the species, soon finds a very much warmer feeling springing up towards the amiable individual

who seems to do so much to further the hilarity of the proceedings, and would not in the least mind seeing with his hounds a few more of his kind.

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I do not lay claim to any great knowledge of the tactics and strategy employed by the force of highway fox-hunters which I have very recently joined. I am but a humble "recruity" striving to learn, but appalled at present by the difficulties which present themselves to the road-riding brigade. Of the dangers, I may have something to say later on.

The difficulties, briefly stated, are embodied in the effort to see something of the hounds in chase, and of their followers, by sticking to His Majesty's highway, and such lanes or "boreens," as they say over here, without doing more in the way of jumping than to scramble through or over a line of gaps which lead from one road to another. Also the difficulties of avoiding harm by heading foxes, getting in front of hounds, or carrying them on beyond the line if they are running in an adjacent field, by the terrible clatter raised by the hoofs of our horses.

Readers will perhaps pardon an egotistical vein that may appear in this brief record of recent experiences and the reflections to which they give rise. I thought there was something a little like a frown on the good-natured face of my medical attendant as he "spotted" me at a meet last week—my first appearance after a longish spell on the sick list—and when he enjoined me to "dodge about the roads and not to do too much," I meekly resolved to obey, at all events for so long as the hard-riding medico

was anywhere near. Hence my attachment to quite a strong force, which I came to think was distinguished for its good-humoured excitability, its knowledge of the country in which we were manœuvring, and its attention to the commissariat department.

It is easy to conceive the intense interest and constant excitement which can be derived from the chase when dodging about the roads, but its vexations seem so numerous that I am inclined to think I had better attempt still to encounter the perils of the fields than the safer but more circuitous plan I endeavoured to follow a few days ago. That there is much amusement to be derived, there is no doubt; to carry on the game successfully requires decision, knowledge of country, and knowledge of the run of a fox; also one must be a judge of pace and be able to gauge quickly the strength of scent, which regulates pace.

He is a happy man indeed if he succeeds in getting parallel to the line and has hounds running alongside him in the field adjacent to his road; and if he be really fond of hounds, he has a far better view of their work than their followers, whom he is now able to hold in supreme contempt. "Look at those confounded fellows; why will they press the hounds so? Why won't they give them room?" I heard wrathfully uttered more than once the other day from the road; for the habitué of the highway has his eye upon horsemen as well as hounds, and if he be honestly a road-rider, and not the least ashamed of it (and why should he be?), it may be dangerous to "buck" in his presence or make lame excuses for refusals or

non-appearance. It was a terrible moment for an unfortunate *blagueur*, who always used to impress upon us that some curious piece of ill-luck had alone prevented him from seeing the finish of a run—it was a terrible moment, I say, when, after explaining at length how stirrup and leather were switched off at a “horribly hairy place” when he was “close to hounds,” a well-known road-rider, in a voice that could be heard half a mile away, said, “Here’s your stirrup-leather, that we saw you hang up on a gate-post”! The unhappy victim was unaware that he was in the next field to the road when the accident occurred.

Of course, the crowning triumph of the road-rider, the moment of supreme happiness, is when his sagacity has enabled him to get to the scene of the finish, the kill or the mark to ground, before any of the field brigade have arrived; and this he is usually able to do once or twice in a season if he be a constant attendant. For if hounds have been running for any length of time, and he has kept in any sort of touch with them, it will probably happen that a well-known wood or other fox-covert lies at length directly in front of them; the road-rider then executes a bold forward movement, and if he has a handy road arrives at the covert in time to see hounds run into it. It is also a moment to be proud of when he has managed, by his knowledge of the country and unhesitating tactics, to place himself where he views the fox, hounds, and horsemen cross a road. To do this is the dearest ambition of the road-rider, and I imagine he mentally scores a good many points in

the game when this comes off; it sometimes comes off several times in a run, but that is exceptional, quite a victory, for he wins all along the line.

In a former chapter I ventured to consider the subject of "holloas." Now, the holloa of the experienced road-rider is the one the huntsman loves best of all to hear, and, probably recognising the voice, he will come to it like a shot, knowing it to be "gospel." No one has such an opportunity of judging if the fox he views be the hunted one or fresh as the road-rider who has been long at the game. He is not unduly flurried at the moment, and can take a quiet scrutiny; if he sees him in the next field to the road, he can tell pretty surely if he is the run fox, while if he crosses the road he is on he can make a certainty of the matter. For my experience has taught me that a hunted fox seldom goes straight across a road, which he looks upon, I fancy, as a help to baffle his foes, and he is pretty sure to run along it for a few yards at least before turning into the fields again, and the view one gets of him on the road, when with drooping brush and arched back he shuffles along, settles all doubt as to whether it is prudent to holloa or not. Of course, as was remarked before, it very often happens, particularly in England, that there are two foxes running in front of hounds, but the line of the chase will direct the observant rider as to the advisability of the holloa.

Please let me here remark that these observations are written without any idea of disparaging the road-rider and his manner of procedure. At

no very distant date I feel I may join that cheerful host, never to desert it; and, having had plenty of fun in another way, look forward placidly to a little more of a different sort, so it is well to study the subject when one can.

The "infinite variety" of pleasure that is derived from fox-hunting is one of its greatest holds on the community. Hard riders, soft riders, good riders, bad riders—all enjoy the sport in their different ways; and, though one hates to see the gorgeously apparelled youth who has been talking big at the covert-side give a hurried glance round and make straight for the road the moment the glad view-holloa is heard, yet we recognise that it is fitting and proper in every hunt that a certain body should make for the road and stay there. Elderly men who have had their day—men whose nerve is not what it was, but who love the cry of a hound—cheery individuals who let us all know they hate the fences but love the fun, individuals in search of health, girls who are forbidden to jump, but who, nevertheless, are keen as possible to come out and ride—all these form component parts of a crowd that, as I said before, is perhaps more excitable, and certainly more good-humoured, than the rest of the field, while there is no mistaking the heartiness of their enjoyment.

Their disappointments are even harder to bear than those of the thrown-out division in the country, for the days come very frequently when they absolutely see nothing of a run. These are usually those wonderful scenting days when hounds fairly fly over the

country and can burst up a fox—any fox that ever waved a brush—in fifty minutes; and when scent lies in this fashion the day's sport generally consists of a succession of fiery gallops most unsuited to our friends on the road. But in the "great run" or the good hunting run we may be pretty sure that the clever pursuer on the road will see as much of it as most of us who are lobbing along after the pack.

I spoke of dangers on a former page, and I think those who notice the proceedings on the road will admit that there is some reason for using the word. The pace, to begin with, that is often sustained along "the 'ard 'igh" for quite a length of time is rather alarming to one who has been taught to have consideration for legs and feet, while the volleys of mud and pebbles that are cast behind resemble grape or shrapnel; so it is no joke to be a rear-rank file, and perhaps that is one reason that all press so eagerly forward. Then one sees corners twisted round in manner quite appalling, and in threading through a shoal of traps, the drivers of which are often gazing intently over the hedges, both skill and excellent nerve are required.

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"The Man who Hunts Because it is The Thing to Do," is an entirely modern production. He is, from all account, becoming more common every year. In spite of all the increasing difficulties with which the sport has to contend there is no manner of doubt that it grows more fashionable with each recurring season, and this, too, when we are told that the country squire, who may be said to have invented

the sport, is gradually disappearing, being too often obliged, by the changed conditions of country life, to let his ancestral home, if not to part with his hereditary acres.

In my edition of Stonehenge's *British Rural Sports*, published over forty years ago, it is stated that "there are at this time nearly one hundred packs of foxhounds in England and Wales, exclusive of a considerable number in Scotland and Ireland." In *Baily's Hunting Directory* of 1909-10 we find 179 packs of foxhounds in England and Wales, besides 24 in Ireland and 11 in Scotland. This increase of nearly 100 packs of foxhounds in England and Wales in forty and odd years assuredly testifies to the extraordinary popularity of the sport at the present day, in spite of all the difficulties that seem to threaten its continuance. These figures, indeed, make one rub one's eyes in wonder, and as the mighty hosts of the pursuers, thousands upon thousands of the booted and breeched, rise before us in imagination, the thought also arises: How many in every thousand hunt solely because others do?

It has become "the right thing to hunt—you're out of it if you don't," as a beginner explained to me not long ago. Therefore sooner than be "out of it," nearly every one hunts who can, though a very great number would very much sooner stay at home. It may seem strange and curious to the philosophic mind that folk who are held to be sane should embark upon a pursuit, or the pursuit of pleasure, simply because other people do it; that they should spend their money and a great deal of time on its

prosecution only for the satisfaction of being able to say that they have done so. Yet there seems to be no other discoverable reason for the presence of some folks in the hunting-field. The wearing of a scarlet coat is said to attract some thither, but the pleasure derived from going so arrayed must pall after a time and satiety follow. No interest in woodcraft, no vaulting ambition to negotiate timber or twig, has drawn forth this particular type of fox-hunter from cosy fireside to the rawness of the chill covert-side; but a certain sense of duty sustains him through the ordeal, the duty he owes to society which compels him to hunt so many days in the week for so many weeks in the year.

"Only a fortnight more of this, thank God!" murmured a well-known society butterfly of the Victorian Era, as they picked him up after a complicated sort of fall with the York and Ainsty. He was Yorkshire, you see, and bore a name that is a household word in the shire of many acres; therefore, he would never have shirked his season's hunting had he hated it even more poisonously than I feel sure he always did.

The great increase in the number of foxhound packs of course bespeaks an increase in the number of their followers; but yet, if an analysis of the hunting-field were taken, it would be found that it is with certain packs only that this increase has taken place. Many most renowned establishments in England where sport is consistently good have fewer folk hunting with them now than of yore. These packs will generally be found in counties where game preservation is on the increase, and new-comers have somewhat overpowered the old

residents by the weight of metal they carry. But in certain other counties, known well to hunting men, the cult of the chase predominates; hunting-boxes are snapped up as soon as built, and are occupied from the first fall of the leaf till the chime of Easter bells is heard by a crowd of folk some of whom are the very best and keenest of sportsmen, but many others who have no claim whatever to be considered worthy of the name, but who are simply carrying out part of a yearly programme which compels them to be so many weeks in London, so many more in Scotland, and to hunt in some fashionable locality during the winter.

Four years ago I paid a delightful visit to the West of England to hunt with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds. My only previous visit had been during the mastership of Mr. Mordaunt Fenwick Bisset, with whom I stayed when a boy. At that time, I should say, the average field numbered between twenty and forty; but four years ago—well! it is most difficult to compute the numbers of a field with the Devon and Somerset nowadays owing to the country they are spread about in, but we know it has become a matter of hundreds. One used to be filled with amazement at the remarks heard about the sport, and I feel quite certain that fully one-half the folk who came “a-hunting the wild deer” had not the most distant idea what was going on during two-thirds of the time they were out. So long as the weather was fine, however, they all had a delightful outing—“a picnic on horseback among the heather,” some one described it; nor were snowy tablecloths, ice pails,

and powdered footmen forgotten by some of the picnickers.

It was when the tufters were at work, and my host and I waited on the fir-clad hillside, that we heard a delightful scrap of conversation from a group below us. "Then do you never go to Scotland now?" said one fair dame. "No," was the reply; "all our set have quite given it up for the last three years. I like this much better, and it's really cheaper."

I made the acquaintance of another who had forsaken Scotland for the alluring wildness of the more gentle West, and she confided to me that the strong air of the North did not agree with her, and that she was fascinated with the West country, though both her husband and herself considered stag-hunting "most awful rot"; but my suggestion that she could stay at home was met by "Why! one must do something!" This reason, which has brought so many dilettante fox-hunters to our hunting-fields, without any previous education in the sport, has produced one variety of the type under consideration; and it would be very desirable for the interests of fox-hunting if they confined their attentions to the pursuit of the stag, where they cannot do very much harm.

It is of the migratory species that we have been chiefly treating up to the present, but the Man who only Hunts Because it is The Thing to Do is to be found also in fair numbers in his native county. Never caring really for the sport, he yet supports the county pack with his purse, and by his presence because his neighbours do so, and pays his subscription

to the Hunt as a matter of course, just as he pays his income-tax. He is not likely to take any very active part in furthering the interests of the sport by managing a district, walking a couple of puppies, or making a fox-covert, but he "comes out" and spends part of the day in the saddle, when he will, perhaps, gravely discuss the affairs of the nation with any one who will listen to him ; but, though he may have lived all his life in the country, he is as ignorant of anything connected with the hounds and their management as the peripatetic butterfly who sends down his horses in November to some fashionable locality and sells them in Leicester when the cream of the season is over.

The migratory variety of the species being essentially your fashionable fox-hunter, he is, it is hardly necessary to say, distinguished by the up-to-date splendour of his attire and general appointments. The cut of his coat, the curve of his hat-brim, the length and colour of the tops of his boots, are matters to him of supremest importance. A few years ago it was correct to have several inches of a gaily coloured silk handkerchief protuding from a cunningly devised pocket, and without this somewhat unnecessary demonstration that he was in the habit of blowing his nose like a Christian he would have been profoundly miserable. It was *de rigueur* to buckle on his spurs so that the necks were placed half-way up the calves of his legs, and to wear them at his heels would have made him unhappy ; while I have an acquaintance who, I am told, positively refused to come out one morning because among his numerous

pairs of leathers not one could be found that was cleaned to his entire satisfaction. I meet him occasionally in divers places and in different array, but always picture him as he was described to me seated in the middle of his dressing-room surrounded by piles of snowy buckskins, "sweerin' at lairge" at his unfortunate valet.

Surtees has given us in his novels many pictures of country fox-hunters who patronised the chase for almost every reason that could be imagined save a love of the sport, and if some of these sketches seem to incline to caricature, most of them, I am told, were drawn from life. In these, the Man who Hunts Because it is The Thing to Do, is not forgotten, and we wonder who really enjoyed himself most, Mr. Puffington in *Soapey Sponge*, or Mr. Willey Watkins in *Mr. Romford's Hounds*. Other reasons still more curious carried many of Surtees' characters into the field—Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey (chairman of the Stir-it-Stiff Union) to cut his gibbey-sticks, Archie Ellenger to try and secure a dinner, Mr. Bunting to try to secure a wife; but we may hold up Mr. Puffington as the prototype of many a man who has appeared before the world as a fox-hunter because he thought it the correct thing to be—no exaggeration or caricature this, but a carefully drawn and correct likeness. His ambition to achieve popularity led to the placing of the magic letters M.F.H. after his name, though as Mr. Jack Spraggon observed with a sneer, he had "as much taste for the thing as a cow"; and this really may be said of numbers who come out hunting in the beginning of the reign of

Edward VII. They have no taste for the real sport; they care nothing about it; they know nothing about it; and, worst of all, though they engage in it so largely, they never seem to try to learn anything about it.

Hence the constant appeals and remonstrances from Masters of Hounds in the field and from Masters and others which appear from time to time in the sporting papers. The man or woman who hunts Because it is The Thing to Do is no fancy type, and too often is an unmitigated nuisance.

Last of this series of types let me place the Fox-hunter on Wheels—not the man who hunts on wheels, if you please, because some of the most interested and successful of those who pursue the fox in this fashion are ladies; indeed, my own experience leads me to declare that there are some ladies whose talent for seeing something of every run from a light pony-trap is little short of marvellous.

This degree of excellence is, however, the result of considerable practice and experience, and great knowledge of the country; but, besides this the successful driver must assuredly have a very real knowledge of hunting and the run of a fox. Few hunting days go by in my part of the country, no matter what the state of the weather may be, that do not bring certain traps to the meet. Few runs are brought off when one of them at least is not within hail of the finish, the owner being sometimes actually present, having left the trap in the nearest road.

In his *Riding Recollections*, Whyte-Melville, referring

to the late Duke of Beaufort, says: "I do believe that now, in any part of Gloucestershire, with ten couple of the badger-pyed and a horn, he could go out and kill his fox in a Bath-chair!"

It is astonishing how, when the mind of the clever hunter on wheels is quickly made up, even in a fast thing, he is usually able to see something of hounds, and always something of the field, or at any rate of a part of it, and probably that part which affords the most amusement. A good many years ago, in the Carlow country, I was disabled for about three weeks, and during that time on most hunting days I was given a seat in the dog-cart of a very popular lady, who was quite the best fox-hunter on wheels I have ever seen; and as the "gun-carriage," as her trap was nicknamed, was always stored with good things, and I was employed to dispense these, I found also that a measure of her popularity had attached itself to me, which restoration to the saddle, I fear, dispersed. Only once when we drove together did we taste the bitterness of entire defeat, but the course of the chase lay from east to west, and all the roads seem to run north and south. How we did scuttle along, leader of a whole string of vehicles, which always blindly followed my charioteer! And, worst of all, their occupants loudly blamed her for going wrong—"just as if I asked them to follow," as she justly remarked. But as a matter of fact, on this occasion hounds raced from Rathdaniell Gorse to Russellstown almost quite straight, and, though we saw the find and opening burst, we had no means of following the line of the chase.

It was a curious experience, which became very interesting and sometimes keenly exciting, when, after seeing hounds and horsemen disappear in full cry, we would peg along at a rattling pace, twisting round corners and suddenly halting. "Can you hear them now?" or "There they go!" as the whole chase would burst into view. We saw the end of a very fine hunt in South Kildare, or, rather, the last few moments in the open, from a road at Davidstown which we had reached in time to view the fox across. He was staggering along, looking very high on the leg as I pulled out my watch. We could not hear a sound for two long minutes. At last it came to us, but, beat though the fox appeared to be, he was three minutes in front of the disreputable-looking objects that then swarmed up on to the road. Most of them seemed to be of a uniform drab colour, so covered with mud and travel-stain were they, and a half-smothered, angry growl accompanied them as they crossed the road, to break into an honest, cheery cry when they reached the field beyond. It was another minute before two or three horsemen struggled into the flat, holding field, but before they reached the road fence Goodall and one or two more, who had kept their heads about them and knew the locality, came clattering along the road, having avoided the boggy field but never lost sight of hounds all the way from Devie's Furze. The fox was well up on Corbally Hill by this time, so Goodall's face hardly betrayed contentment, nor did that of one of the advancing horsemen in the fields when his horse fell back in attempting to jump up on to the road. The

next man flung himself from his jaded steed, and, jumping alongside his horse, landed safe, exclaiming as he did, "Oh, why didn't we stick to the road when they crossed it just now!" It was the proud boast of my fair pilot that she had never headed a fox in her trap, but on this occasion Goodall blurted out "Wish you had managed to head him off the hill!" for Corbally Hill grows much strong covert in which there are many foxes.

In some countries "the traps" are often as thorns in the side of the huntsman, and there is no doubt that the drivers should submit themselves to the control of the M.F.H. or Field Master, who will place them in positions where they are not likely to interfere with sport when a covert is being drawn. That is about as much as he is able to do; everything afterwards must be left to their own sportsmanlike behaviour and good feeling. They have come out to have their day's amusement as lookers-on, and must be careful that they do not mar it by over-eagerness or stupidity, for it is often very easy for a maladroit driver to spoil a right good run; but, on the other hand, the knowledgeable Jehu who keeps his eyes about him may often give assistance to the huntsman for which that functionary will be grateful. Perched up above his wheels, our sportsman can often get a great view of the surrounding country, can note the wheeling sheep, those curiously fluttering crows, the distant pedestrian with his hat off, and, perchance, the wily villain himself stealing smoothly round the base of yon distant green hill.

There must be a very strong fascination about this

amusement, for I notice that certain traps are never absent from a meet, and come long distances to the fixtures, letting no foul weather deter them. As with other varieties of the fox-hunter, there are specimens of this type to be met with in different ranks of society, and I think the cleverest followers I know are two retired tradesmen; these never, I believe, rode to hounds, yet there must be something very remarkable about the run of which they do not see a good deal from their little trap.

In some Hunts the carriage contingent is a very large one indeed, and I have heard in one country that the assiduous Hunt secretary has suggested to some of the followers on wheels, whose immediate relatives are not members, that they should subscribe towards the funds of the Hunt which gives them so much weekly amusement. This is a step which would not meet with approval in the country from which I write, where we are old-fashioned, and cap our neighbours to the extent only of the modest half-crown which is usual all over Ireland, believing that all sportsmen should be neighbourly one to another, and feeling it a pleasure to welcome all who live on our borders to share our sport. At the same time, those who drive after hounds consistently all through the season, and derive pleasure from so doing, might well make a graceful acknowledgment of the same by communicating with the Hunt Secretary in a manner which could not fail to please.

There is one way in which the drivers after hounds can very often do a very useful turn, and that is by closing any gates that they may observe left open

on the road where the line of chase has passed. When stray colts or cattle come out on the road, and wander aimlessly about, it is well also to give information of the same at the nearest cottage. By so doing the fox-hunter on wheels will call down blessings from both peasant and pursuer, and much trouble may be avoided by the timely action.

CHAPTER XVII

HUNTING MISERIES: LOSING ONE'S START—THE DOUBTFUL DAY—THE BLANK DAY

I WRITE in a period of misery to hunting men. A hard black frost holds the country in its iron grip, and surely nothing could be more exasperating than such abrupt cessation of sport. And yet I don't know. There are other disappointments that come sometimes to every hunting man, the very recollection of which is sufficient to cause nightmare when we retire to rest. Have all hunting folk their own particular nightmare, I wonder? Some have confided to me that such is their case. One fair lady used to dream that hounds were running hard through the park of her old home. She saw them from her window, and, rushing out to the stable-yard, could find no one there. Never mind, she would saddle her favourite herself! Alas! old Schoolboy's box was locked, and "give her all the world" she couldn't find the key.

When my own old mare, Dyspepsia, comes round ready saddled at about 3 a.m. on a frosty morning, I invariably find that I lose my start in that endless wood I know so well, where so many different rides diverge in different directions. Why do I always

take the wrong one? Goodness knows the deep-voiced pack is making noise enough (is it possible that in reality the sounds are one's own "nasal respirations"?)—yet up that ride we invariably flounder to find it end in a gap made up six feet high and interlaced with barbarous (forgive me!) wire. So back we go and strike another ride, which is full of rabbit-holes that bring a sinking of the heart at every stride. Yet somehow we get into the open to view a fair landscape, across which rapidly moving dots of scarlet and black are scurrying. We have "lost our start"! But yon village spire suggests a means of catching them by a safe short cut. Alas! when we gain the village street it leads up an endless hill so steep that the horse seems to go backwards instead of forwards, and, dismounting to lead up in despair, we wake to find it all a dream. It was a dreadful dream, and the awakening brings relief; yet, horrible though it was, what was it to the misery of "getting left" in reality with a good hunt in progress—a mishap which must happen at times to all hunting folk, no matter how keen and determined they may be, or how successful they usually are in obtaining a good start.

There are many causes utterly unforeseen and unavoidable that may bring about the catastrophe; a stirrup-leather may break; you may be cannoned and "knocked endways" at the first fence; a horse may fall in front and block up the only possible spot in the bullfinch; a lady or one's best friend may come to grief alongside, and gallantry, humanity and friendship compel you to draw rein; a fresh fox may run

back and be viewed ; “Tally-ho ! back !” is shouted, and you pull up, unaware that the pack is on with another one—such are some of the reasons I call to mind in my own experience which have caused me to lose a start and begin that progress so full of anxiety, of alternating hope and despair, known as “riding a stern chase.”

Hounds are away, and from some reason or another, probably through your own stupidity or obstinacy, you have lost your start, and, recognising the situation, you set to work manfully to try to catch them. They cannot be so very far in front, you argue. Here are fresh footprints ! There is an indescribable noise in the air, and you fancy you can see the man on the haycock ahead looking westward and shading his eyes ; so, setting your teeth and hardening your heart, you make a bee-line across country for that haycock. Jumping your fences a thought quicker than usual and bucketing unmercifully between them, the haycock is soon reached, and a hurried inquiry elicits the shout “They’re ten minutes gone.” Be not dismayed ! Your watch will show you it is little more than ten minutes since they *found* their fox, so you may safely set the ten minutes down as two, or three at the most, and, catching sight of horsemen in front, you peg away at the same reckless pace. Soon you grasp the probable direction of the chase : you make up your mind as to the possible point, if you know the country ; and you form your plans. If, like the immortal Soapey Sponge, you “would be first or nowhere,” and despise “plodding on the line,” you will probably pull up here. If, like myself, you are cast in less ambitious mould, you will

persevere, trusting to a check, a friendly turn, or a convenient road to bring you up to them again, and push on all eyes and ears, all hopes and fears; but your anxiety will only make the reward more sweet if fortune do but favour you.

If a friendly road does present itself and lead in the direction of the disappearing forms, my advice is, get on to it at once, even if you have to lead over the roadside fence or risk a fall to take you there! Once on the "'ard 'igh road," peg along it, regardless, for once, of legs and feet; you are sure to gain a bit here. But keep your neck stretched and a bright look-out over the fences, and should you see the scarlet or black backs turning away from you, hesitate not, but quit the highway at once, and again pursue diligently. Many are the disappointments you may suffer, many the difficulties you may encounter: a bit of rising ground hides the chase from view, and give you pause, but pause as seldom as possible. That sound which brought you up with a jerk was not the chiming of the pack, but the gabble of geese and turkeys at yonder farm close by. That sound that thrilled you so, again, was not the huntsman's horn (as you discover when you stop to listen), but the braying of a jackass, or the distant lowing of cattle. Those yells you heard came not from the followers of the pack, but from children released from the roadside school.

Trust not too much to the ear, but depend chiefly on your eyesight to bring you out of your difficulties; and, if your horse be a good one, the chances are that you will speedily overtake some of those who

have been treated as scurvily by Diana as yourself, and you may find yourself the leader of a band of unfortunates who may look to you for aid. Trust little to information. If you are hunting in Ireland, the country folk are often too much excited to give you practical help by pointing out a means of getting a "nick," and the chances are they wish to see you leap some fences close to them; or it is just possible they do not particularly care to see any more horse-men riding over their holding, and may designedly mislead you; but this last will not happen often. Remember, however, to take no heed of statements as to the time when the hunt passed; the minutes of expectancy when the advancing host were approaching seemed ages to the longing spectators, and there was so much to see and talk about, so many exciting incidents that delighted them, therefore the minutes have nearly lengthened themselves into quarters in their imaginations by the time you arrive.

It is best when you are striving thus to get on terms with your leaders to follow them religiously, and not to ride for your own hand. Make for the gaps that they have made; that will be better for the farmer the chances are, and better for yourself, too. You may think that by jumping here or jumping there you can cut off a bit, but be very sure where you are going before you try it. You may find that the field you jump into is wired on three sides or contains new grass, or wheat, when you must come back in the first instance, or ride religiously round the headlands in the second. But where others have gone, you can go; and if you make up your mind

to do so, you can do it quicker than those who have preceded you, and have made your task an easier one than theirs. When landed in one field, the hoof-marks will direct you where to look for the exit, at which you will arrive without hesitation or delay, and you will be pretty sure to cross the intervening space a trifle faster than did your predecessors. Should you overtake a beaten sportsman or one who has met with disaster, remember that he will be full of despondency; and, even though he be clad in the "Scarlet Livery of the Chase," heed not his tale of woe if he does not require your personal assistance, but hurry on.

You may be unsuccessful, but the chances are in your favour. Hounds seldom run on for very long so deadly straight and without such pause as to give you no sort of opportunity of closing. Your experience tells you that of those who start fairly with hounds a very small percentage retain their places close to the pack, and if you overtake some of the laggards, you will be pretty sure to pass a few more, and each set you pass places you in a better position, till at last you meet with some reward by hearing the unmistakable cry of hounds in front. This will prove a fresh incentive, causing your spirits to rise in a truly marvellous manner, and if a few minutes later you are able to shout "Yonder they go!" your happiness will be great. It will be supreme if shortly you find yourself where you have longed to be for what seems to you half a lifetime at least, and can see the pack—and what a disreputable, mud-stained lot they look!—opening and shutting like a fan close in front

of you, swarming and bustling over the fences, and find yourself among the lucky ones who have been there from the start.

It is now time to think of the good bit of stuff between your legs that has brought you here, for you may be pretty sure that he has both galloped faster and gone farther than the steeds he has now joined ; therefore it behoves you to take no unnecessary liberties with him if he is to stay there. So you must look out for the sound going, the wet furrow in the ploughed field, the firm headland and the firm take-off, and above all things do not hurry him up the steep incline. If there be ever so slight a pause he will catch his wind, and when he has gained breath, the sight and sound of hounds will stimulate the brave beast as they do his rider, and you need have little fear but he will carry you gallantly to the close. The extreme pleasure that is now yours is enhanced by the anxiety you underwent during the long stern chase, and by the miseries you suffered when you became aware that you were left behind. So intense is your satisfaction now by contrast with what has gone before, that you almost wonder if the lucky ones who got away with hounds and stayed there feel more truly happy now than you who lost your start.

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What may be termed "doubtful days" have come to us very frequently in Ireland this winter, owing to the very sudden appearance of sharp frosts when we least expected them. We have taken our bedroom candlesticks and marched upstairs to the accompaniment of a soft tinkle of rain on



This is Jones, who thought to slip down by the rail early in the morning, and have a gallop with the fox-hounds. On looking out of the window, he finds it is a clear frosty morning. He sees a small boy sliding—actually sliding on the pavement opposite!! and—doesn't he hate that boy—and doesn't he say it is a beastly climate.

(Drawn by John Leech.)

the window-pane; but the opening of shutters next morning has revealed fantastic patterns of fern and foliage executed in high relief by the frost upon the glass, and despair has taken possession of our souls.

There is in the collection of *Mr. Punch* a truly heart-breaking picture by John Leech, which represents a sportsman clad in his "nighty" (pyjamas were unknown in England in the fifties) looking out of his window. Misery and wrath are depicted on his countenance, and a pair of beautifully cleaned top-boots stand on the floor beside him. "This is Jones, who thought to slip down by rail early in the morning and have a gallop with the foxhounds. On looking out of the window he finds it is a clear, frosty morning. He sees a small boy sliding—actually sliding!—on the pavement opposite! And doesn't he hate that boy—and doesn't he say it's a beastly climate!" Probably Jones, as he intended to hunt by train, went back to bed, and there the matter ended; and several times this season we have looked out of the window and thought of Jones, and found a face wearing a similar expression reflected in the looking-glass: but then we reflect that one night's frost was seldom known to stop hunting when the sun shone brightly the next morning, and so the miseries of the day begin. First there is a consultation with the groom before dressing for hunting. Now, grooms are always decided pessimists or equally decided optimists as to the feasibility of hunting. If your man be an optimist, why, the horse "goes on"; if the reverse, he is generally told to wait till you

come out, in which case too, in my experience, the horse generally "goes on." Nevertheless, you feel in your heart of hearts grave doubts while you are attiring yourself—doubts which assail you with ever-recurring frequency when, after breakfast, you get into the trap to drive to the meet. The ground is "cruel hard," and the hoofs of the hack ring with metallic sharpness on the dry, white, unyielding road. What about the hounds and their feet? He (the M.F.H. is "He," of course) is desperately keen certainly, but will He take them on such a morning as this? And you reflect darkly upon the provisions in the Servants' Compensation Act.

But the thought arises that there is a good deal of grass on the roadsides between the kennels and the fixture, and you are induced to proceed—despite the fact that the breath from your horse's nostrils and your own ascends like smoke into the heavens. In a field adjoining the road, however, there are two ploughs hard at work, and, "when you can plough you can hunt" has long been an axiom connected with the chase, which you have never known to be refuted in practice—at least "hardly ever"—and you tax your memory for instances in support of the well-known saying. Then your ears catch the rattle of wheels behind you, and a friend overtakes you, his tall hat betraying that he is bent on the same errand as yourself.

"I suppose we're mad!" is his cheery exclamation, and, while inwardly disposed to agree with him, you broach the theory of the plough, and can see that it brings to him a crumb of comfort which a bit of

shaded road speedily discounts. "Freezing still in the shade, I'm afraid, though," is the next observation; a fact so cruelly evident that no printable reply is necessary. We ease the pace a bit, and console ourselves by remarking that "There's no need to hurry at all events, for they won't throw off before twelve o'clock on such a day."

It's a wintry drive at best! The peewits in the grass fields look gigantic, and the starlings as large as peewits. The rooks that follow the plough are very tame, not to say impudent, and the cattle keep close against the fences, huddling together for warmth, their heads turned towards the gate in patient expectation of the arrival of the fodder cart; and the distant hills are white to their very bases. But there is warmth now in the sun, and the short grass begins to sparkle with moisture. We overtake a fellow-sportsman hacking on and dealing his scarlet-clad chest and shoulders resounding claps with hands encased in white woollen gloves. "The hounds are just ahead," he declares. "I suppose He'll try and hunt somewhere! It *might* be rideable by one o'clock!"

Then the pack is overtaken, and the cheerful visage of the first whip as he removes his cap is the best thing we have seen this morning—except the plough. "'Unt, sir?" says he in answer to our query. "Of course we'll 'unt! Nothing to stop our 'unting at twelve o'clock! Why, it never froze till early this mornin', sir! Only hopes we'll have a scent, sir! That's what I'm doubting about. What with this sun and the rime on the north slopes!"

This is good hearing; but our experience is not of

yesterday, and it seems to us as we advance that we are getting into even a harder country than we have left behind, and we reach the meet just as the Master's motor-car overtakes us, to find that though many besides ourselves have not cared to risk losing a day in such a very uncertain season, they are very much divided in opinion as to the advisability of hunting. That, of course, can only be decided by the M.F.H. himself. On his shoulders rests the whole responsibility, and it is no slight one. It matters, after all, very little to the field.

If hounds do not come to a meet there are always some captious individuals ready to declare that it was "quite fit to hunt" where they came from, or that a neighbouring pack were out. Of course, the toes of the hounds are not taken into consideration ; nor, what is more important still, the limbs and necks of the Hunt servants. Captain Spurrier may go out on one of these doubtful days as full of ride as ever. And when hounds find and go away, he may also "get away on their backs" as usual ; but when he jumps into a field of short grass and his horse's legs seem suddenly to go all ways at once, and this pleasing performance is repeated at the next fence, he opines that "it's not good enough" and makes for the King's highway. It is not so with the servants : their position is very different.

It is not meet, perhaps, for a hunting man to prate of the danger of the Hunt servants' calling, for the follower of hounds shares the dangers of the chase with the professional ; and yet I may be allowed to point out that the risks are not quite the same, and

that the life is a pretty hazardous one. Take the case of the huntsman and his aides on this doubtful day, when the bone is still in the ground, when the take-off is slippery, the landing adamantine. Once hounds are away he must ride after them, to stop them, perhaps, if ordered, to keep in touch with them somehow or other, at all events if he can; and in trying his best to do so he undoubtedly runs great risk of serious accident. The result has often been a crushing fall and a broken limb.

It is not a politic thing for a Master of Hounds to mount his men badly; and yet how badly a great many of them are mounted! How often have I seen the pitiful spectacle of hard-working, gallant men trying day after day to smuggle over dangerous fences brutes that were only fit to send to the kennels! How particular most of us are about what we ride, though! "If a horse gives us more than three falls in a season, I must pass him on," a friend of mine used to say. "This beggar never lets me off with less than three a day if hounds run, sir!" said a Hunt servant to me of the uncertain brute he was riding; yet he said it in no complaining spirit, but as if it were all in the day's work.

The charge of intemperance is often brought against Hunt servants as a class; and it may be at once conceded that many of them succumb to the temptations which surround their calling, and I verily believe that no other class of men are so tempted. In the first place, there is the "treating" system. The Hunt servant is always a bit of a hero in his own neighbourhood, and never finds himself in a village in the

country without meeting some one to press him to "a glass," never enters a house where he is not offered some form of liquid refreshment which would perhaps be denied to any one else. On a cold, raw morning, when they pass with the hounds on their way to the meet, the servants will very frequently be hailed as they come opposite the door of the village inn, and tankard or bottle proffered, when the morning wind blows bitter chill or the wet fog makes one cough, is mighty hard to refuse. So is the tray with the white cloth on it and many bottles and glasses which the footman brings out to the men when hounds arrive at the meet before the hall door, and we may note what liberal measure is served out to the favoured horsemen who are held in admiration by so many. "But drinking and hunting are twa men's work," as the Duke's Scotch huntsman, Mr. Jock Haggish, said in *Plain or Ringlets*, and I "hate that glassing, glassing" just as much as he did, for it has brought ruin to some of the best and cleverest servants I have known.

It is on the way home, however, that temptation most often assails the Hunt servants in a manner which is very hard to resist. Tired, and empty as to the stomach, for he has eaten nothing but a crust since early morning, his limbs weary from long-sustained muscular exertion, the Hunt servant jogs home with one or two of the field who are pretty sure to be going his way. Hunting men are proverbially hospitable; if they have had a real good day the hospitality fairly overflows, and will take no denial. "Glasses round and pails of gruel at the first pub.," then "Now it's my turn. Shall we say the

same as before?" and all the rest of it. To some men a certain amount of stimulant taken on an empty stomach may revive the tired frame and be beneficial, but to most it is baneful, and, mounting quickly to the brain, often reduces the gallant horseman to a very despicable object before he reaches home. One glass might do no sort of harm, but it is this unhappy custom of treating and tempting to "another with me" which plays the mischief with the men, and has brought to the class an evil reputation for insobriety. Surtees' sketches of "Swig and Chowey" in *Facey Romford's Hounds* are only too true to life.

Then there comes a time to some men when on certain mornings there is a consciousness that the nerve is not quite what it should be. Bad horses and heavy falls have tried it pretty highly perhaps. Yet it will never do for a servant to "funk." He feels that if he begins to show a delicacy in his pluck, as they say in Ireland, his reputation will be lost, and resorts to the ancient but mistaken expedient of "keeping his spirits up by pouring spirits down." Hunt servants, by the way, are not the only fox-hunters who have been known to patronise jumping powder; but then as Mr. Pigg said to his Master, "Ye've nae call to ride for raputation," though the servant has.

Not many fox-hunters, I think, are aware at what an early age a very large proportion of Hunt servants are considered past their work, but a glance at "Huntsmen and their Records" in that invaluable publication, *Baily's Hunting Directory*, will considerably astonish most sportsmen who peruse it, for they

will find there the dates of the birth of many well-known professionals who have been so long before the world that they are looked upon as old men, but the figures tell a different tale. The life for half the year is a hard one, and few men can stand the shaking falls that come at some time or other without feeling lasting effects as the years pass by.

Dear me, dear me ! How I have been rioting ! All this has arisen from contemplation of the risks the Hunt servants must run if the M.F.H., too sanguine or too anxious to please his field, decides to move on to covert. But what I have written may stand : perhaps it may prompt some of my readers to send a subscription to the Hunt Servants' Benefit Society—an organisation which has pre-eminent claims on all hunting men.

What I had in mind is the responsibility that rests on the Master in these doubtful days. Humanity bids him consider well his decision, apart from economic reasons. Seldom in any country do bridle-roads and by-lanes enable Hunt servants to get to their hounds without jumping if they are required to stop them, while in Ireland the idea is quite impracticable, for there are no bridle-paths and not too many gates. Altogether it is a matter for most serious consideration. However, to make the best of it, the gathering at a meet is always a pleasant one ; so we mount, and seeking a sunny spot to move about in, await the decision of the man in authority. He will, of course, "give the day a chance," so we have time for much pleasant conversation, and hear opinions on the state of Europe and other things.

During a hard winter more new tales and anecdotes are hatched in Clubland and other parts of the British Metropolis than usual, I think, and on an occasion like the present you are sure to hear a yarn or two, and perchance a verse, that will bring a smile to the gravest, though grave folks are in a minority in the hunting-field. Then there is the last good run to recapitulate, and we hear news of the doings of the neighbouring packs, of whose followers some will probably be present. So the minutes pass. At last the fiat is given. Is it "hunt" or "go home"? If the former, there are times when a great run is brought off, as was the case in Carlow on just such a day last week; or we may pick our way about in doubtful pleasure, with an indifferent scent and with hounds only just able to puzzle out the tortuous ways of Reynard, who is taking it very easy in front; in which case there will be much hesitation in the order of our going, and no great anxiety displayed to get at the fences. If, on the other hand, "Home" be the word, we retire, hating more heartily than ever the miseries of "a doubtful day."

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A few pages back reference was made to one of John Leech's hunting sketches in *Punch*. May I be excused if I call attention to another drawing by the same artist? It is called "A Frolic Home after a Blank Day," and is one of the most spirited and not the least amusing of Leech's hunting sketches. The group of horsemen who are frolicking home in this reprehensible style is composed of several very different types of humanity, and the steeds they

bestride represent most of the different classes of horseflesh one sees out hunting in the provinces. Unlike most artists who have represented scenes of the hunting-field, Leech never drew one "sealed-pattern" horse, and never made his riders sit each in exactly the same fashion. He was not perhaps always equally happy in the delineation of the noble animal, and the cheeks of the bit he placed in its mouth, when he caparisoned it with a double bridle, were invariably absurdly long. But the life, spirit, and humour of the chase he seized unfailingly, and charmed us by the truth and atmosphere of the little bit of landscape he always introduced. A large engraving of the "frolic home" hangs upon my wall, and is irresistibly drawing me from my subject, but I am chiefly struck by the joviality and hearty enjoyment betrayed by the countenance of every individual in the picture. Even the face of the stolid rustic, hurrying out of the way of the youth with the hunting-cap, who, finger to ear, executes a view-holloa as he passes, combines amusement with alarm; and the gentleman whose horse has refused the hurdles with disgraceful abruptness seems entertained by the performance. The very back of the stout yeoman, whose good "family horse" is flipping over the obstacle, somehow expresses enjoyment; indeed there is infectious merriment about the whole scene.

How different—how very different—from the dejected crew that lately wound their way homewards after the first blank day I had seen for a long time. In these days sportsmen all over the

kingdom, I trust, know better than to regale themselves on their way home by a "school" across country, common though the practice used to be not so very many years ago—a practice which is said to have originated in the Midlands in the days of Dick Christian, when one of the feather-headed "thrusters" exclaimed, "What fun we should have if it wasn't for these d——d hounds!" Nowadays, though a solitary horseman homeward bound, may jump a fence or two to cut off a long distance round by the road, we hear too much about damage to fences and the "cutting up" of land when hounds are running to make it expedient for a bevy of sportsmen to "frolic home" after a bad day, after the fashion of the olden time. Yet I think the miseries of the blank day are so depressing that something to raise our spirits and put us in heart again is sorely needed; and if on such an occasion we have a farmer out with us who desires to show us the way over his own land, I, for one would not decline to follow his lead.

Happily the blank day is a misery that has seldom fallen to my lot, but the rare experiences of the calamity are very deeply impressed upon my memory. We, in Ireland, are experiencing a long period of drought, and at such times, even in well-foxed countries, foxes are very hard to find. The last blank day, mentioned above, was the only one I have seen for several years, and I trust that a still longer time may elapse before I see another. It was a weariful experience, but for many hours in the day we were buoyed up with hope, while in the morning we looked upon the finding of foxes as such a certainty that the

man would have been voted a lunatic who suggested the possibility of a blank day.

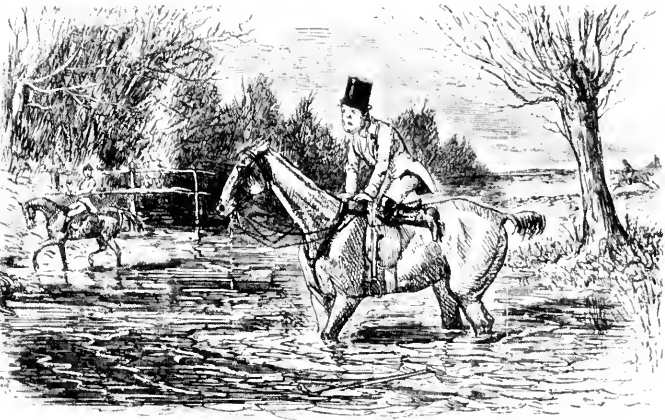
First of all, we met where we had never met before, because foxes abounded in the immediate neighbourhood, we were told, and there was abundance of wild gorse, &c., which was strictly preserved by the owner of the land. Doubtless it was the resort of foxes very frequently. There were smeuses and billets to prove that, and once or twice some old finder of the pack would conduct her investigations so rigorously as to make us hope that she had discovered traces of a line; but there was no challenge, and we came away to repeat the performance elsewhere several times during the morning. Something like a sigh of relief went up when at length the M.F.H. went away from these outlying places, and, getting on to the high-road, set off at a good honest trot for ascertain wood, from which no fewer than five foxes had gone away the last time it was drawn. If ever there were a certainty, it was before us; but Diana decrees that there shall be no certainties connected with fox-hunting. If there were, perchance the sport would lose some of its fascination. The wood was as blank as the faces of the crowd outside, when the long-drawn blast of the horn was heard to summon hounds from the covert.

Nevertheless, though the day was wearing on, hope did by no means forsake us, for seldom are the gorses on the hillside without a fox; but after careful investigation again the mournful blast was heard. The weather, too, had turned against us now, and bitterly chill came the blizzards from the black north



MR. BRIGGS GOES FOR A DAY'S HUNTING, AND HAS A GLORIOUS
RUN OVER SPLENDID COUNTRY.

(Drawn by John Leech.)



GOING TO COVER.

Voice in the distance. "Now, then Smith come along!"
Smith. "Oh! it's all very well to say come along! when he wont
 move a step; and I'm afraid he's going to lie down."

(Drawn by John Leech.)

as glen and ravine were searched with equal want of success. Yet the ladies—several of them, regardless of change of complexion and transfer of colour from cheek to nose—braved it well, and sooner than accept a blank day followed on in support of the M.F.H. to the biggest woodland in the country, where we suffer, as a rule, from a superabundance of foxes. It was colder still, and horses' coats were staring when we got there. Halting on the road above the wood, we listened intently for the opening note—sure of that at least, though we hardly expected a gallop in the open. Alas, it never came! A puppy caught in thick briars (as we afterwards heard) gave vent to a howl, which caused men to look at their watches and say, "At last!" but there was no repetition of the sound. Despair took possession of our souls, and a most miserable party shortly afterwards dispersed to respective homes, the hounds—poor things!—looking perhaps the most dejected members of the hunting community. Truly we had experienced in their full bitterness the miseries of a blank day.

Some years ago a blank day was saved by our finding a fox in the very last covert in the stop; he ran back till he almost reached the fence of a gorse covert we had drawn in the morning, where he got to ground in a big stone drain just outside the covert. A terrier was put in at the other end, when out came our hunted friend, followed immediately by *three* others. Of course, there is no doubt that on wild nights foxes are often stopped in, particularly in gorse coverts where the gorse has grown hollow and open, when the long stems rattle and shake and give,

one would think, a feeling of discomfort and insecurity to the fox; but in most woodlands that are not disturbed by trespass there are snug places which a fox prefers to any earth, natural or artificial, even when the weather is too vile for him to pursue his nightly ramble outside.

One of my own most disappointing experiences of a blank day in Ireland was about twenty-five years ago, when I drove with a friend nineteen miles—Irish miles, too, I think—to meet Mr. Robert Watson and his hounds at Limrick in his Wexford country. We drew some good coverts in a fine country without a touch of a fox, and were very sick at heart when we prepared to drive home. That was on a Thursday, and on the following Saturday hounds were to meet at Coollattin, Lord Fitzwilliam's place, where we had our trap. One of the family suggested our leaving horses and servants at the stables there and coming back to hunt on Saturday. This we did, and were rewarded by a good gallop, which we should not have seen had a good day been our lot on the Thursday, for Coollattin was a fixture we had not planned to attend; so fortune, for once, made some amends for a blank day.

Nineteen miles (Irish) seems a long way to go to a meet, especially when one has a blank day after getting there; but last year, wishing to see some new country, I drove twenty-nine miles to the fixture—or rather was driven, but the vehicle was a very excellent motor-car, and the drive through a pretty country seemed nothing at all. Except that the weather was fine, we experienced all the miseries I have described, and came home saddened after a blank day.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME HUMOURS OF THE CHASE

"I go out hunting to amuse myself, not to try to break my neck," an old hunting comrade of mine in bachelor days used to declare, and he always appeared to succeed most undeniably in his endeavour. Gifted with a delightfully sunny disposition, the keenest apprehension of the humorous, and a fine flow of animal spirits, it was seldom indeed that he failed to make us laugh in the evening over some of his experiences of the day.

Though I do not think he ever pretended to any great appreciation of hunting so far as houndwork is concerned, he is a keen lover and a good judge of a horse, and riding was one of his greatest pleasures. Nothing connected with any horse that was out escaped him. He made a point of noticing what every one rode, and how they rode them; while falls, refusals, and blunders were stored up in the treasure-house of his memory as well as the masterly achievements of other coveted steeds.

Such a man could hardly fail to find amusement in the hunting-field, even on a bad scenting day, and being socially inclined as well as being a universal

favourite, he was not dependent entirely on canine or equestrian performances for his day's pleasure.

A man like my friend perhaps derives more steady, uninterrupted pleasure from the hunting-field than the greatest enthusiast on the subject of fox-hunting who rides out on a hunting morning with a mind so full of anticipation of the joys of the chase that the many disappointments which, alas! most days bring have a very disturbing effect upon his equanimity. If, however, this more severe order of sportsman be also blest with an appreciation of the humours of the hunting-field, they will prove his salvation when he kicks his boots off after a poor day, and retires to his snuggerly to ruminate thereon.

It seems rather unfair that so much we find amusing out hunting should be afforded us, and often most unwittingly, by the principal performers in the piece—the M.F.H. himself, or his huntsman; yet such, I am afraid, is the case. His sayings and doings are noted and commented on by all; words uttered in moments of irritation—"cuss words," perhaps, as our American cousins call them—are repeated, and perhaps slightly elaborated, not in any spirit of mischief, but merely because, from their extreme earnestness, they sounded amusing; and undoubtedly some of the best of our well-known hunting stories, which, like "The Grouse in the Gun-room," never grow stale, are founded on the expostulations or repartees of certain celebrated Masters of Hounds.

It has appeared to me that an amateur huntsman after a season or two becomes possessed of a wonderful aptness in reply, which seldom fails to amuse, and also

generally of a fine flow of words, an eloquence which is sure to be highly entertaining—to some of the listeners, at all events. Yet, strange to say, those to whom this gift is given often appear unaware that they possess it, and profess entire forgetfulness of the words which have excited so much admiration—possibly, and perhaps, astonishment. It is as though, during the excitement of the chase, some spirit takes possession of them, and they speak with other tongues than they use for the ordinary purposes of conversation.

There is a well-known tale which relates how a late celebrated M.F.H., when making preparations for a “dig,” overheard a horseman of Semitic birth remark that in his country they would never stop to dig a fox in the middle of a good scenting day. “In your country!” said the wrathful M.F.H., turning upon him; “if you were in your country you’d be mounted on a jackass chasing jackals round the walls of Jerusalem!”

A friend chaffing him afterwards about this bold flight of fancy, asked, “What on earth put such a thing in your head to say to the man?”

“Gad, I don’t know!” was the reply. “Since you all say so, I suppose I must have said it; but how it came into my head I don’t know.”

“Where’s the d——d woman coming to now?” groaned a great amateur huntsman once, as a lady, valour overcoming her discretion, landed upon a road in far too close proximity to hounds, whose heads were up. Half an hour later the pair were jogging along side by side. “I suppose you are aware that you called me ‘a d——d

woman' not long ago?" quoth the lady. "Impossible!" said the gallant and ready old Irishman; "I called you a grand woman; and so you are, begad!"

We feel sure that the great Mr. Jorrocks, though he declared to James Pigg that he would see him "frightening rats from a barn wi' the bagpipes at a 'alfpenny a day, and findin' yoursel', afore I'll 'ave anything more to say to ye," would have been quite unequal to such vituperative recrimination when dismounted from Arterxerxes, or in the quiet retirement of Great Coram Street. But of the facetious sayings of Masters of Hounds there is no end.

Still, many very celebrated Masters and several famous huntsmen have left behind them a reputation for the good things they have said in the hunting-field, and it seems a pity that more of these conversational plums have not been preserved. It is most aggravating in "Nimrod's" Memorial Sketch of the great John Warde in the *Sporting Review* to read of the "well-known" good sayings of that celebrity, his "well-known reply" to Mr. So-and-so, and his tale concerning something else are mentioned, but "Nimrod" gives no more information about these jests than honest Diggory did about the aforesaid "Grouse in the Gun-room"; and we must be thankful that more recent authors have not followed this example. Sir Reginald Graham in his *Fox-hunting Recollections*, for instance, records the delightful story against himself. "With all the confidence of youth," writes Sir Reginald, who had found himself alone with the puzzled pack (the Burton, Lord Henry Bentinck, M.F.H.) "I proceeded to hold hounds down wind and then in other directions.

No doubt I must have thought it encouraging to the pack to wave my right arm with energy as I took them along. All in vain. They never touched the line again. I looked round once more : What did I see ? Fifty yards behind stood Lord Henry himself, the Messrs. Chaplin, Chandos Leigh, and Charley Hawtin. Would that the earth could have swallowed me up at that moment ! Slowly, step by step, the cavalcade approached ! I heard a smothered ‘Hush !’ and yet another pause. At last Lord Henry, in slow, measured tones, almost hissed out, word by word, ‘*Sir Reginald, when you have quite done feeding your chickens, perhaps you will allow my huntsman to cast my hounds.*’” One of Colonel Anstruther Thomson’s whippers-in when he first hunted the Fife, Charles Pike by name, must have been a bit of a wag. Pike afterwards became huntsman of the Quorn, when the hapless Marquess of Hastings was Master, and Colonel Thomson tells us how “Colonel Lowther meeting Pike in Leicester one day said, ‘Well, Pike, what are you doing ?’ He answered, ‘I’ve got the sack. Marquis has taken to drink, Hermit has won the Derby, and we’re all going to hell together.’”

There was a first whip and kennel huntsman in a neighbouring country to that from which I write whose sayings used to amuse us not a little some few years ago. He was a cheery fellow ; keen and hard-working too and very ready with his tongue. He was possessed of a strident voice which he got ready for action by clearing his throat with a sound that might have been audible a mile away, and the throat, when once cleared, seemed incapable of emitting any sound

that could not have been heard about the same distance.

“Slip round quietly to the other side of the covert,” said the M.F.H. to him one day as we approached a famous covert in the South Kilkenny country. “Slip round quietly, and make no noise.” “Yezzir,” replied the servant, cantering off with a reverberating “Come up, ’oss,” and commencing the throat-clearing operations as he progressed along the covert-side. On arrival at the corner he evidently found it occupied, for, despite the distance, we plainly heard that raucous “whisper” rattle off without the suspicion of a pause, “Now, little boy, wot are you a-doin’ off ’ere? Don’t you know terrible big fox lives ’ere? last little boy he ate was twice as big as you.” The fox was at home all right, but it is hardly necessary to add that he did not break from that quarter as we fondly hoped he would.

The same functionary sharpened his wit on a couple of peasants one day when a bad fox got to ground after a short gallop. The M.F.H. determined to have him out, and two country fellows with a terrier were quickly on the scene. “Best wait for the kennel terrier,” said the whipper-in, looking with some contempt at the local candidate for underground honours; but Mr. Langrishe, ever anxious for the country folk to have a share of our sport, thought otherwise, and encouraged the countrymen to get him out if they could. The dog was duly taken between his master’s knees, “rustled up” and introduced into the earth, but very quickly came back; he was tried again and again, but though he “challenged” he could not be induced to go to his fox. “Get a candle! Best get a candle!” said



FOXHUNTERS REGALING IN THE "GOOD" OLD TIMES.

(Drawn by John Leech.)

the whipper-in, in tones of suppressed triumph at the failure. "And what the devil would I want a candle for?" said the countryman, with astonishment. "'Cos he's afraid o' the dark. Can't ye see he's afraid o' the dark?" said the delighted whip. "Hah! 'ere comes old Jakes" (a kennel terrier). "Now we shan't be long!"

The second whipper-in in some Hunt establishments has been known to fill, in addition to his active occupations, a position somewhat similar, in its passive duties, to that of the whipping-boy of ancient days, or at least to act as a sort of buffer to divert his Master's wrath from the really guilty.

"Ned," who was for many years second whipper-in to that glorious sportsman the late Mr. Robert Watson, used occasionally to act as a safety valve for his Master's wrath: but I recollect an occasion on which he fairly turned the tables. We were running a fox from the Bullingate covert towards Coollattin, and were on the hill-slopes above Donishall when scent failed rather suddenly. A good field was out, several strangers who were staying with Lord Fitzwilliam among the number. Ever anxious to show sport, the Master appeared to be doubly eager that day, yet cast as he would he could get no touch of his fox. At last, far below him on the Carnew road, his quick eye discerned a scarlet-clad horseman with his cap off: it was Ned! his own Ned! whom at that moment I am sure he heartily blessed. Getting the pack to his horse's heels with one touch of his horn, he hurried at break-neck speed down the slopes. "Which way did he go?" shouted he, as soon as he got within hail of his servant.

"Did what go?" roared Ned in reply. "The fox, ye donkey!" came in stentorian tones from the Master. "I saw no fox," returned the whipper-in at the top of his voice. "Then what the devil did you raise your cap for?" thundered the M.F.H. "To scratch me head!" stolidly replied Ned, and there was a silence that could be felt before our uncontrollable laughter arose.

The unconsciously spoken truth, "I'm afraid we're in for a good thing, confound it!" blurted out by a faultlessly got-up shirker as hounds poured out of covert on a scent evidently of the best has become almost classic. One can imagine the delight of those who heard it.

In Ireland the conversation of the foot-people when a covert is being drawn, or when one meets them during the progress of a run, is often delightfully amusing, and one is thankful to the authors of *The Experiences of an Irish R.M.*, for preserving many typically quaint sayings of the peasantry when "the Hunt is out," and they are enjoying the winter amusement they love. The expressions used are comical to a degree, particularly when the spectators get a bit excited, and the English visitor is usually considerably edified.

"No man," said an old gentleman by the covert-side very gravely, in my hearing,—"no man is anny use to folly dogs—only a fierce-goin' man through the country!" And I think it will be admitted that "fierce-goin'" is delightfully original and descriptive.

"Give me ould Watson's dogs," said a bystander, when the late Earl Fitzwilliam's hounds were drawing

a covert in the Carlow country, "the Lord's dogs don't bawl anythin' worth while."

Those who have the happy knack of remembering quaint sayings like the above, which one hears every hunting day in Ireland, are much to be envied; particularly if they can be induced to pull them out for our edification afterwards.

Whyte-Melville delighted in an Irish story which came from these parts, and he introduced it into *Satanella*. Two country folk were admiring the horse of a well-known welter squire who was always splendidly mounted, and one summed up the matter by saying, "Sure, ye niver see his honour but ye see a great baste!" The same squire in later years grew very obese, and in England one day rode down at a fence which was guarded by an excited agriculturist and his myrmidons armed with pitchforks. "Let this 'un coom!" roared the farmer,—“let this 'un coom! He's *sure* to faall, and he'll mook half an acre o' land."

Few hunting days pass without some very comical sights coming under notice, and the humours of the chase invariably crowd in when a bit of open water has to be encountered; for, somehow or other, the spectacle of a fellow-creature disappearing from sight beneath the waters never fails to arouse laughter, which is repeated when he emerges; particularly if he lands on one side of the brook and his horse on the other. This is horribly barbarous and unfeeling, no doubt; but the fact remains.

Tom Firr's story of the gentleman who popped his head up from the middle of the brook at which Tom was riding, said "Cuckoo!" and ducked under again,

and repeated this performance three times, will be remembered. The incident must have been about the most comical ever witnessed out hunting.

“What the devil are you doing there?” was the rather inane inquiry by a gentleman of a second horseman, who was floundering about up to his armpits in very green-looking water. “Only gathering water-cresses for supper,” was the unruffled reply; “what the — did you think I was up to?”

Open water that cannot be forded but must be leaped is not often met with in Ireland, but when it appears it never fails to afford “diversion.”

A few years ago I was out hunting on the occasion of an “exchange meet,” when a neighbouring pack had come down to have a day in the country. I cannot say that I much appreciate these invitation days. They invariably give rise to jealousy and unsportsmanlike rivalry in the matter of riding, which is very antagonistic to sport, for hounds seldom get any chance of fair play on these occasions, when “show me a Meath man till I lep on the small of his back” is the style of business that prevails. On the day in question, however, a fair gallop was brought off, and, as luck would have it, after crossing a little bit of stiff country, a *bona-fide* brook (Hibernice, “a river”) appeared in front. There was a great scatteration and several duckings, a lady, I regret to say, getting about the worst. Had there been additional jumping powder served out that day, I wonder, or did the presence of the visitors’ pack account for all the strange and daring feats, we saw? When the scrimmage was at its height, one welter-weight rode down to the water’s

edge, dismounted, and bestowed a hearty crack to the quarters of his steed, which plunged into the water and swam across. His master watched him land with interest, and then, and only then, the idea seemed to strike him that there might be a difficulty about rejoining partnership. I saw him scratch his head and stalk solemnly up the bank. The pace was too good to make further inquiries, but it will be long before I forget the scene.

The inquiries, expostulations, warnings, and words of advice that one hears flying about during the progress of a run over a stiffly enclosed country are often very comical; but it is well to make up one's mind to be good-humoured, if possible, during the hustle that often ensues, particularly at the commencement of the chase, and if one has to remonstrate, to do it as politely as possible.

A friend of mine—alas! now with the majority—used to contain his anger at times with difficulty, but always so successfully that it exploded in withering and overpowering politeness. “Pray, sir,” I heard him once exclaim to a stranger, “in all this fine country, can you find no other place to ride but on the nape of my neck or the small of my back, where you have been the entire day?” At the commencement of a sharp gallop, in the long ago, which followed one of the “invitation meets” I have noticed, one of the strangers rode right into a well-known luminary of the Kilkenny Hunt, an elderly gentleman of light weight and lively temper, a very hard and slightly jealous man to hounds. Poor Mr. — was sent flying into a deepish ditch just as his horse was taking off.

The destroyer of his start, I must say, behaved properly, for he pulled up, and was profuse in his apologies ; but I think I can see his victim now as, fairly grinning with rage and disgust, he snarled, “ I suppose you came a long way to do that, bl——t ye ! ”

CHAPTER XIX

"JOVIAL HUNTSMEN": SOME CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

THE "Festive Season" is with us again, with its showers of postcards and swarms of pictorial annuals. As usual, the artists have been busy depicting strange scenes from the hunting-field, and hounds are once again running their hardest over snow-clad pastures.

Ever since Ralph Caldecott produced his delightful picture-books and his amusing sketches for the Christmas numbers of the *Graphic*, the British fox-hunter, and particularly he of the early Georgian era, has been a most favourite subject for Yuletide illustrations.

How well we know his voluminous scarlet coat wide skirted, and reaching well below the dark mahogany tops; the broad knee garter encircling the leg *above* the knee, or the bunch of dangling ribbons below! How familiar the mulberry complexion—suggestive of "collar glasses," "bumpers of fine fruity old port," and much toasting of the "favourite lass," as well as frequent libations in honour of horse and hound when they "passed the bottle round!"

The "Jovial Huntsman!"—he is always thus repre-

sented, and his carouses round the punch bowl, his quaffing of the nut-brown ale brought to him at the village inn door by the rosy, buxom Hebe with the trim ankles, and his salute on parting with the fair cupbearer, all have been given to us both “plain and in colours” over and over again, and our purveyors never seem to tire of supplying the same dishes.

Well, they know what they are about, I presume, and find ready sale for their wares; but I wonder if the fox-hunter of long ago was really a cheerier mortal than the rest of mankind—as cheery, in fact, as these pictures seem to suggest? He was a bit of a roisterer, we all know—our great-grandfathers mostly were—whether they hunted fox or hare, or stayed at home; but fox-hunting seems always to have fostered good-fellowship and sociability, though in the two-bottle days the good-fellowship was doubtless a bit too exuberant. I maintain, however, that there is in the pleasures of the chase something that does call forth geniality and dispels gloom, that leaves recollections which one feels anxious to impart to others, and a desire also to compare notes and hear the opinions and adventures of our friends.

In these less expansive days it is considered correct to conceal to a certain extent one’s exaltation, and we smile at the doings of our ancestors, whose hearty custom it was to gather together as many comrades as they could at dinner after a day’s hunting; toast and song went round, and they heard how “a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaimed a hunting morn,” and a good deal about Aurora, and bright Phœbus, and chaste Diana. Such was their

invariable habit when they "had a rattling day, look'ee there," and probably such also was their custom when they only "powdered up and down a bit" just to cheer them for the want of a better run. We know that these convivial gatherings were prolonged, but as they feasted in those days at an hour we should consider the afternoon, I imagine that their port-laden slumbers began correspondingly early, and the small ale which was used instead of Lord Byron's "hock and soda water" on the following morning cooled their parched throats and cleared away the cobwebs before "bright Phœbus cleared away the dusky plumes of night."

As time wore on and fox-hunting on the "system of Meynell" took the place of the old-fashioned peep-o'-day business, it became the favourite recreation of the most cultivated men in the land, and if the Hunt Club meetings, which became general in many countries, were more decorous in their conviviality than the orgies which celebrated a good run in days of old, they were still full of hilarity. No doubt much wine was drunk, but much wit came out; and songs which can never die so long as the sport exists were written to be chanted at these merry meetings.

The rules that governed the social proceedings of these Hunt Clubs make sufficiently amusing reading in this age of lemon squash and barley water; for any infringement thereof was visited by a fine which invariably took the form of a certain number of bottles of wine; we read in the chronicles of the H.H. that even the great Mr. Villebois himself was

"fined half a dozen of claret for appearing at a meeting in a waistcoat without the H.H. button"; while in the Duhallow, one of the oldest Irish Hunt Clubs, a similar fine was inflicted on the president elected by the president of the last meeting should he fail to take his place.

The rules of the old Tarporley Club in Cheshire, established in 1762 for *hare-hunting*, provide that "three collar bumpers be drunk after dinner and the same after supper"; after that "any member might do as he pleased in regard to drinking." But when, in 1769, the club commenced fox-hunting it was ordained "that instead of three collar bumpers only one shall be drunk except a fox be killed above ground, and then one other collar glass shall be drunk to 'Fox-hunting.'"

I must admit that my own stock of antiquarian lore is unequal to the task of explaining the term "collar bumper." A friend suggests that it may be "an application of an old phrase 'to bring home to the collar': which means "to nearly finish a garment in process of making—specifically a shirt." Inasmuch as collar bumpers were drunk after dinner and supper it seems to me that the term might mean 'finishing bumpers'!" This suggestion seems to me very likely to be correct.

The club, it would seem, was at first opposed to its members embarking in matrimony, for by one of the old rules every member on his marriage was required to present "to each member of the Hunt a pair of well-stitched leather breeches"—perhaps a wise provision for the inevitable!



FOXHUNTERS REGALING IN THE PRESENT "DEGENERATE" DAYS.

(Drawn by John Leech.)

Mention of the Duhallow Hunt reminds one that the old Irish Hunt Clubs were always celebrated—or shall I say notorious?—for their conviviality, and that, though there may be cause for regret that these old Hunt gatherings have become only memories of the past, the high revelry and general “divilment” that accompanied them were often discreditable.

Some of the scenes that took place must have been very amusing, nevertheless. I was told only a couple of years ago, by an eye-witness, who was a member of the old Kilkenny Hunt Club, of the famous ride of Mr. John Courteney, of Ballyedmund (who first brought the Grand National to Ireland), up the brass-bound stairs of the club-house, into the dining-room, and over a wicker fire-screen placed on the backs of two chairs before the fireplace; also of the expostulations of the lady in charge of the club-house, and Sir John Power’s humorous threat as to the steps he would take if she objected, and her defiant reply.

Among my own acquaintance was a grave and worthy gentleman, now deceased, who, in his youthful days, after a Hunt dinner once disposed himself at full length across the street in front of that club-house, and, chuckling with suppressed laughter, declared to his expostulating friends that he intended to upset the Waterford Mail which was then due; and I knew well a certain grim old gentleman who, on the only occasion he was ever known to allow his potations to get the better of him, was safely packed in a passing, empty hearse, and conveyed home to a somewhat shrewish spouse!

We have heard, too, in more sober England, of roister-

ing evenings, of high jinks at the Old Club at Melton and elsewhere; but these be things of the past. The increasing presence of ladies in the hunting-field has softened the manners and improved the taste of the day; the fair partakers in the sport, who began to hold their own over the country, by no means objected to talk over the day's amusement in the evening with their cavaliers, who forsook the festive board for their company, and had neither need or wish then to celebrate in “collar glasses” the fox killed above ground; though I trust that “Fox-hunting” may long be drunk in winter-time ere we join the ladies.

It must not be forgotten, however, that these Hunt meetings were convened not only for purposes of revelry; it was the custom to transact at them much business, and to ventilate ideas concerning the sport and its improvement; suggestions were made and carried; and perhaps men spoke their minds more freely than they do in the garish light of day round a formal table covered with pens, ink, and paper—and no collar-glasses.

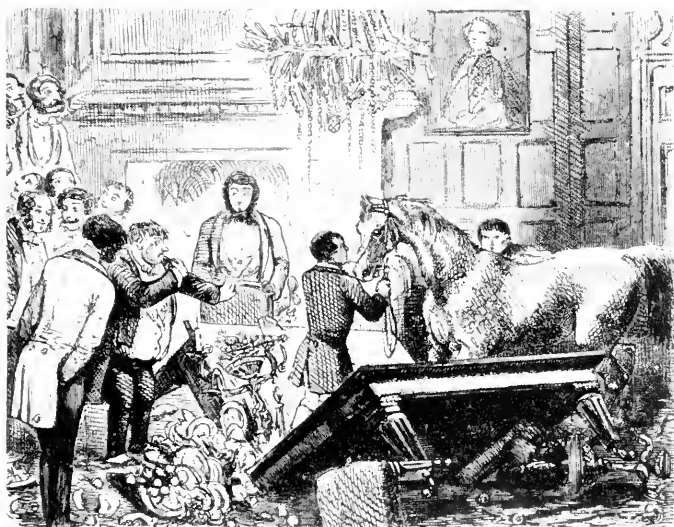
I have an old Hunt card in a scrap-book, placed there in youthful days, with a deep line under one of the fixtures to remind me of a famous run. The card is old-fashioned, a printed form, the fixtures filled in with the pen; the year is 1866, the month January, and opposite Thursday, 25th, is written “Killerig X Roads; members dine together in Carlow.”

Well, the Hunt dinner is a thing of the past; the members no more “dine together,” and, indeed, going out to dinners in the country in winter-time has long been voted a nuisance intolerable. “Where the



Country Friend to Sporting Gent. from Town. "Well, Jack, I told you wo
should have a capital day. You see the frost has quite gone."

(Drawn by John Leech.)



Mr. Briggs stimulated by the accounts in the new papers of the
daring feat of horsemanship at Aylesbury,* and excited by Mr.
Haycock's claret, tries whether he also can ride over a dining-room
table.

(Drawn by John Leech.)

(* During the Steeplechase Week, 1851, Mr. Manning for a bet jumped his
horse over the dinner-table in the Rochester Room of the "White Hart.")

M.F.H. dines the M.F.H. brings his night-cap" was the ultimatum of Mr. Jorrocks, and met with such approval that it is often now imitated by the field; yet, though I was not a member, I "dined in Carlow," a youthful guest, after the great day from the meet at Killerig, and have a very pleasant recollection of the evening. I heard more about fox-hunting and great runs than I ever had listened to in the same space of time, the proceedings were perfectly decorous, though amusing, and there was no necessity for "sermons and soda-water the day after."

To such a gathering one cannot but look back with pleasure, and one may sigh for something of the same again. "Come and dine and sleep, and we'll swop lies about hunting," writes a friend, an ex-M.F.H.; but I can't, so he's coming to me instead, and I have another to meet him: 'tis the best we can do in these times. The strong north-west wind has driven away the dark, overhanging pall that has for so long remained close to us and gloomily discharged perpetual rain; it will dry up the sodden land and let the horses have a chance; and who knows but the scent may improve? Here is a strong sunburst, too, as I write, to cheer us up and make things look ready for Christmas—a time that, in spite of the grumblings of paterfamilias, I think has an attraction for the most morbid. There is a grinding of the gravel, a tread of horses' feet on the avenue, and a wild cheer from the nursery windows. Have we not the young ones home again to rejuvenate us? It is good to notice how soon the question comes, "Where are the hounds this week?" and to see how eagerly the card is scanned. I think

we shall hardly want a “*Hunt dinner*” while the holidays last!

There is no time of year when fox-hunting is so popular as this. In an open winter we who dwell in a hunting country cannot help wondering what substitute exists in less favoured localities for the sport and universal good-fellowship which the hunting-field affords. What else could bring together the troops of boys and girls to delight us as they assemble at the meets with their radiant happiness and amuse us with tales of the prowess of each tiny steed? Twice a week the trusty pony is certain to be brought out if the fixtures are at all convenient, and the M.F.H. is pretty sure to arrange that they shall be tolerably central during holiday-time. Here the youth of the countryside have a chance of meeting and forming friendships which may last a lifetime—and friendships formed in the hunting-field seem to have an enduring quality.

In all countries at Christmas-time dances and social reunions prevail when the short winter's day is over; but in the hunting country the partners often meet again the day after the ball; and when evening falls they do not find it difficult to decide between the merits of a gallop on the boards or one over the grass. Hunting folk are always hospitable, it appears to me; and there is a give-and-take hospitality connected with the chase which is very refreshingly genuine. Brown, who lives at the far end of the country, sends his man with a couple of horses to you the night before the meet which is near your door, and fully expects that you will do the same by him when hounds are in his part of the world, and

if he offer you a "put-up" either before or after the meet, you know that he will be disappointed if you do not come, and that you will have a good time if you do.

When is dinner with a friend so thoroughly enjoyable as after a good run? There is small chance of lack of subject for conversation on such an occasion, when black Care sits as far from your chair as she did from your saddle during the gallop.

"Dined, o'er our claret we talk o'er the merit
Of every choice spirit that rode in the run;
But here the crowd, sir, can talk just as loud, sir,
As those who were forward enjoying the fun."

Yes! we can still all go pretty straight over the mahogany, and I notice little change in the prowess of your youth-hood when the tobacco is lit. And yet!—and yet!—it has been whispered that they of the coming race seem a trifle less keen to get at their fences than their fathers were in the days "when all the world was young and all the trees were green"; when our gracious monarch went so well with the Pytchley that Charles Payne said to Whyte-Melville, "Sure to make a good king, sir! Sits so well, sir! Sits so well!"

I know not if this whisper anent our lads in their teens be true, but most earnestly hope it is not. "*Laudator temporis acti*," how one hates the rôle!—But, still, the whisper is in the air, and I am asked when we are going to see again a Grand National with as many gentleman riders up as professionals? And where are the boys whose dearest ambition used

to be a mount between the flags? Perhaps if the greybeards who hear the whisper, and sigh sadly when they hear it, had begun their hunting career in a country where every third fence or so conceals a strand of bullock wire, they might not have been so recklessly eager to get forward; perhaps, also, if they had, from the age of seventeen, been in the habit of smoking from fifteen to thirty cigarettes a day, they would not have "sat down to ride so blood-thirstilee" when they reached the brave old days when we were twenty-one.

But whatever they may say of the lads, no one can withhold admiration when he speaks of the forward riding of our maidens, who now form such a considerable element in nearly every hunting-field. In the country from which I write I have several times seen the majority of the field composed of ladies, and nearly all of them meant going from field to field with hounds, while several wanted no lead from any one, and were capable of taking care of themselves. The increase in the number of ladies who hunt is very remarkable. In the seventies there were exactly five ladies who followed hounds in these parts, and really rode up to them, and this little band included three really celebrated horsewomen; in 1906 we have something like fifty side-saddles in the field, inclusive of the little girls on their ponies, who take to hunting as ducklings to the water—that is to say, they take to the riding part of the performance, but whether the working of the hounds and the actual hunting of the fox appeals to them is another matter. That this should be the case is a consummation devoutly

to be wished for in the interests of fox-hunting in the future, so that in the days to come there shall be no more complaints of ladies riding about and chattering loudly when hounds check, or of reckless riding over grass seeds and springing wheat.

In a few days our hunting-fields will be thinned, our Christmas house-parties dispersed, and the boys will be back at school or college, while the small sisters will find their hunting days curtailed after holiday-time, and I think they will all be missed. It is interesting to turn over Leech's hunting pictures, drawn in the fifties and early sixties, and to note how he delights in the portrayal of the juvenile fox-hunter in his Christmas holidays.

Who does not remember the boy on the Shetland who charges the brook with "All right, Ruggles, we can both swim!" or the other youngster who forbids the keeper to raise the sheep hurdle as he is "coming over" on a rat of a pony whose ears are half a foot lower than the hurdle. Then there is the delightful Etonian who, when told by an ancient that he should hold his pony together over plough, replies, "All right old Cock; don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs; there's my man by the haystack with my second horse!" In Leech's day, at all events, the juveniles were very much on the ride, and it certainly is not common nowadays to see schoolboys riding up to the motto "Be with them I will," after the manner of the lads he depicts so skilfully.

It is amusing to denote the demeanour of the young brigade when they arrive at the meet, and to observe the different bent of their inclinations. Most of the

lads get together to chaff and, “buck” about their ponies and their riding, and to exchange school chat; but there will be always one or two who make their way straight to the hounds, and, never taking their eyes off the pack, are soon engaged in confidential chat with the Hunt servants, who, though they may mistrust the heels of the ponies, are invariably delighted with the lads who show interest in hounds, and are most good-natured and communicative. These boys we shall find staying out to the bitter end, having forgotten all about the Christmas cakes and good things at home, and, though they may not be all great riders, are the makings of the sportsmen who come out to see hounds hunt the fox.

Two days a week are, I think, sufficient for any schoolboy, and the distance from home should never be too great. It is the long ride back in the dark that tires and dims the previous pleasures of the day. Of course no one is tired, or admits to fatigue, after a “great run,” but when that comes off a day or two should intervene in order that it may be fully digested. Schoolboys work twice as well when they go back if they confess to having a real good time during the holidays, so the pedagogues tell us; and surely no boys have such undiluted happiness as those who can ride and go hunting.

All boys, of course, do not care about hunting; some prefer the gun, and deem a day’s ferreting the height of bliss; but the lads who hunt I also see blazing away at the rabbits and wood-pigeons; and, apart from the ride they have—which is so good for every one—the society of many of their fellow-creatures



Ruggles. "Hold hard, Master George. It's too wide and uncommon deep."
Master George. "All right, Ruggles! We can both swim!"

(Drawn by John Leech.)

of all ages and ranks, who have all come out to enjoy themselves in the same manner as the boys are doing; "all," as Surtees wrote, "is Liberty, Equality, and Fox-huntity."

The "festive season," though some of it has been spent by one on the sick-list without much merriment, and with a considerable amount of pain, has nevertheless shown up in strong colours the kindness and good-fellowship that exists among hunting men. I have had a daily *levée* at my bedside, and many of those who have come have come from afar off. The posts bring numberless letters of kind inquiry, and more than half of them are from hunting folk, while if wishes could avail I would be out hunting again this week, though against the medical advice to "wait for a few days more." That the great sport "engenders good-fellowship," as old Sir John Power wrote when he founded the Kilkenny Hunt, I do believe, having had evidence of it this Christmastide that will leave grateful recollections as long as life lasts.

CHAPTER XX

WHICH IS THE BEST MONTH OF THE SEASON?

IF I were so unfortunately situated that my hunting was restricted to one month in the year, February is the month I would choose. I look upon it as the veritable "hunter's moon," when the stout travelling dog-fox comes courting from afar.

"The stranger, the traveller, stout, gallant, and shy," who leaves covert as soon as found—nay, often without a warning note being heard. The click of the gate of the covert-field, or the tramping of many horses approaching on the road are hints sufficient for him, and away he steals for some haunt in the neighbouring parish with ten minutes' clear start and all the odds in his favour. If this happen in the afternoon, we have light enough in February to pursue him afar, and the evening scent in this month, I have noticed, is often the best of the year. The touch of spring frost that comes at nightfall so often is in the air, and hounds can usually run like fire on such an evening.

What straight-necked heroes some of these February foxes have proved themselves! What a number of those immortal fox-hunts which have been handed

down to posterity as “runs of the century,” “great runs,” “classic pursuits,” have taken place in “February Fill-dyke”! It was on February 2, 1866, that the Pytchley hounds had their famous Waterloo run, which was the crowning triumph of the late Colonel Anstruther Thomson’s life as a huntsman. On February 22, 1871, an Ash Wednesday never to be forgotten in the Badminton country, the present Duke of Beaufort hunted the historic Greatwood fox, and upon February 16, 1872, Mr. Chaworth Musters brought off the great run of his career—three hours twenty-six minutes from Harlequin, near Ratcliffe-on-Trent, and killed his fox in the open near Tow Hoe, after covering thirty-five measured miles.

Instances might easily be multiplied, for I am a keeper of old diaries, &c., and I note that in February, 1893, I hunted on an average four days a week, and had a run every day I was out.

“February Fill-dyke” is, I think, a misnomer, for in this month the ground usually seems to me in better order for riding than in any other month in the year. It has disadvantages, it is true. Lambs have begun already to show themselves in considerable numbers; top-dressing covers many of our fields; the ploughshare has embrowned the land; and the russet squares show off the surrounding greenery. Worse than all, the presence of the vixen has to be considered when we go to draw a covert, and precautions must be taken to ensure her safety; while the shepherd and his dog, the ploughman and his team, the farm servants foddering cattle in the fields, all cause the wildest countryside to present a more populous

appearance than it does in the months that have gone by.

Nevertheless, the shepherd's dog is less likely to do mischief to the Hunt when attending on his master than when out with a comrade on a roving hunting expedition; the ploughman has often supplied useful information at a pinch, and the fox is not likely to run through heavily stocked fields when he sees the dreaded human being therein; so altogether I think the chase is usually carried on without as many interruptions and obstacles to success as we are disposed to fear, during the shortest month of the year.

Then think of the many pleasures it brings! However much the fox-hunter may be supposed to dread the advent of spring, to loathe the "nasty stinking violets" of Mr. Leech's huntsman, and to shudder at the white masses of snowdrops beneath the trees, he must confess to a feeling of exhilaration when the indescribable freshness of the air at this time of year greets him on his morning ride. The jocund sound of the birds who mistake the month for April cheers him while dressing for the chase, and dispels the gloom caused by the reflection that the season is on the wane. Out he goes rejoicing, and can stay out full of hope till the evening, with no dread of stumbling home over stony roads in inky darkness on a beaten horse, as in November. For his horses now should be in the pink of hard condition, inured to fatigue and handy to ride, as none are in the beginning of the season. If he be a cautious and observant horseman he has learned the run of the foxes from the different coverts;

and how strangely their courses vary with the seasons! And he has also become aware of certain safe places in the fences, of gaps and the positions of the field gates, so that he can be carried as quickly along the well-known lines as the most determined thruster of them all. Then the delights of the evening ride home after the good day that comes so often in February. The “who-whoop!”—last of the day—sounds between four and five o’clock, and, letting out his girths, he turns his head for home. The gloaming falls, but not the mirk, ere he reaches it, yet the clear air holds the light in the western sky, and the dusk throws romance over his way.

“When the shades of evening closing round give a fantastic, curious, mysterious aspect to familiar roadside objects! Loosely lounging in your saddle, with half-closed eyes you almost dream—the gnarled trees grow into giants, cottages into castles, ponds into lakes. The maid of the inn is a lovely princess, and the bread and cheese she brings (while, without dismounting, you let your thirsty horse drink his gruel) tastes more delicious than the finest suppers of champagne with a *pâté* of tortured goose’s liver that ever tempted the appetite of a humane anti-foxhunting poet-critic, exhausted by a long night of opera, ballet, and Roman punch.”

So wrote an author in the fifties, who described with singular felicity what of picturesqueness and poetry is to be found in our sport.

But though I have thus waxed enthusiastic in favour of the claims of February to be regarded “the sweet o’ the year,” it may be that I am singular in my belief.

The late Mr. Robert Watson, M.F.H., whose name appears so often in my pages, was very decided in his opinion that November was the month to choose if one month only were to be allowed him. "Isn't it far the best?" he said, when I put the question to him. "We've waited so long for it that it seems better than all the rest when it does come," and I have both heard and read that this opinion is shared by many. Nevertheless, I believe that if the vote could be taken it would be found that the majority would ask for a month about Christmas-time in preference to any in the calender. Fox-hunting and the Christmas holidays have been long associated in the minds of all whose boyhood has been spent in the country, and that is the time of year looked forward to by many whose work lies in the great cities, for their annual participation in the chief sport of their boyhood, and at no other portion of the winter would it appear so delightful.

That there is a peculiar charm about Christmas fox-hunting there is no denying, and though "sunny memories" may be a misnomer when applied to winter recollections, yet most pleasant reminiscences of delightful sport crowd thick and fast upon the brain when we lie back in the old arm-chair and think of Yule-tides not yet long gone by.

Let me recall a Christmas hunt—a woodland morning and its sequel.

The gates of the great demesne open upon the end of the long village street, and the high wall which shuts out the populace from the park stretches away for miles, embracing in its circuit several thou-

sand acres. All round inside this wall runs a continuous screen of planting, varying in width till at some points the screen broadens into a veritable wood. A wide ride runs along the middle of the planting, following its course round the entire circuit of the great park. Pleasure grounds, lakes, and streams are contained within this area, also several clumps and spinneys of various shapes and sizes, and the fox-covert proper—a little wilderness of privet and gorse—is of all the most carefully watched and tended. Indeed, the demesne is full of foxes, for the proprietor, though a Master of Hounds in England, is not unmindful of the interests of the chase in the land of his birth.

The village is all astir to-day, for the county hounds meet in the great stable-yard, and every lad that carries a stick will be sure to see a fox, and most likely will be present at his death.

Meanwhile there are many horses to criticise, many fast-trotting hacks in the buggies and traps that rattle in at the gates, and glorious excitement when the unmelodious tootle of the motor-horn announces the approach of several of these vehicles which are now familiar to the inhabitants of every Irish hunting country.

Soon we are following the Master, who hunts his own hounds, down the pleasant green slopes towards the woods. The yellow sunlight, breaking in shafts from the heavy grey sky, lights up the scene, and brings the scarlet coats of many horsemen into strong relief as they canter down across the grass.

Clear and resonant comes the huntsman's cheer as

the pack dashes into the thicket of furze and privet, and the trees send back the echoing crack of a whip. A minute later the air is full of clamour, for a fox has jumped up from his snug bed in the long grass among the privet bushes, right under the noses of the pack, and every hound seems anxious to let us know that he is aware of the presence of his enemy.

A knot of countrymen who are standing by my horse are straightway seized with a species of frenzy, and the instantaneous rush for the covert that follows is amusing to witness. But there goes the fox, right across the park towards the plantation by the lake. Every soul that sees him yells, and one urchin who has been kneeling down tying his bootlace, and has seen nothing but tattered leather and green turf for the last minute and a half, gives vent to such blood-curdling shrieks that my sober steed shies from him in fright. Hounds come out, and, catching a view, stretch themselves out over the grass after their quarry. The fleet-footed populace gird up their loins, and tear after them, while their elders collect in knots and shout encouragement. The Master, with the reins on the well-bred chestnut's neck, doubles his horn merrily as he gallops forward, the first whipper-in diverges away to the left, and his *aide* from the covert holloas lustily, "Get away! get away! get away! hoick!"

Now is the time for the lads and lassies on the ponies, who are having a real merry Christmas, and no mistake. With what genuine enthusiasm they set to work! It was a real fox they saw—they all saw him—and there are the real hounds trying to catch

him, just like the pictures! Hurrah! No game that ever was played equals this! It is splendid going, ideal turf—"Forrard, forrard, forrard away!"

We who are old in experience know well that there is little chance of this fox taking to the open country, but that he is pretty sure to go the round of the screens, where he will probably knock up a substitute and save his brush. But it is impossible to escape the contagion. There is a scent, too, it would seem, for the fox twists round a clump of trees, and, though hounds lose their view, they seldom spin round so quickly, even when close to their fox, unless the scent is pretty useful. So a cluster of us who are old stagers ride wide in the direction taken by the first whipper-in, who has reached the end of the plantation the fox has just now entered. He is busy with a gate there as we approach; but I catch sight of a little dark streak that almost seems to be carried by the wind over the grass beyond the planting, so smoothly does it move. But it is our fox, and he is heading for the screens which bound the park. The whipper-in has "missed him," as he says, "when stooping at the gate." There is no need to holloa or shout, or to touch the whistle; the hounds have had enough of that already. Here they come, tearing through the hollow plantation, making the trees fairly ring with the fierce joy of their cry, while the sound of their feet among the red, fallen leaves, which fly up in clouds as they pass, is as the sound of rushing water. The scarlet-clad servant rides quietly forward with his cap in air as they burst from the spinney; the Master is already at the far side, and his cheery horn is followed

by a scream of encouragement which somehow gives one a thrill, and knocks listlessness out of the most phlegmatic. Up come blowing steeds; up come panting ponies, with excited juveniles, whose bright eyes and glowing cheeks testify to unabated ardour. Forrard away! It is a long stretch of grass this time, and in the form of a wedge the pack is straining across it at a pace that soon makes most of the ponies and "good family horses" seem almost to be going backwards instead of forwards, so far are they left behind.

Now the screens are close ahead. Bend away a bit to the left for the gate—and here we are under the trees. "Tally-ho! there he goes along the ride!" He just passed the gate as we reached it, and here come the hounds thundering along, and a bit nearer to him than they were at the spinney, I do think. Follow them along the ride? No, thank you! I know the holding properties of those muddy rides of old. For me, the turf outside, and a canter across to cut off a big corner to the next gate, where we arrive on still hard-pulling horses. In luck again! There goes the fox along the ride, but is he the hunted one? Look round at this other fellow who has come out from the screen behind us, and is hurrying across the park; no longer the smooth-going streak, but apparently high on the leg, and how his brush has dropped! But hounds are coming along the screen still! Hark to their cry! Yes; but see, old Artful is coming away from the screen, and some of her gossips with her in chase of No. 2! Also, hark to the horn, and the Master's "Yoi there!" He has grasped the situation.

Into the screen with us, then ! Line the ride, and stop these hounds. Good luck to us, we succeed ; they hear the horn, too ; and leaving the trees by our gate, catch sight of their friends outside, and soon join them. So we have another brave scamper over the grass ; but the little ones are shaking their reins vigorously now, and I see some tiny whips at work and heels giving fierce digs in the region of the girths.

See ! the foot-people have headed our fox from the covert, and he is turning away for the house. So we can cut off a bit. Yonder he goes into the shrubberies on the hill. Easy now, lads and lassies, up the hill. What is this ? The park wall, and hounds striving and swarming to get over ! Why, he's really away at last ! Make for the gate hard by. Out now upon the road, and gallop down ; and here are the hounds, all in a struggling mass on the road. Who-whoop ! They have him. He crossed the wall, but his heart failed him then, and they pulled him down when trying to get back. Who-whoop ! who-whoop !—a fine strong young fox.

Here is the brush for the girl with the golden locks, the mask for her of the raven curls, and a pad for each of the four brave boys who rode like men in front of the girls.

And now the Master looks at his watch ; then looks towards me. Do I see the shadow of a wink trembling in the corner of his dark-blue eye ? I think I do, and I think I know what it means. "No more of this demesne work for me to-day, my boy. Let's be off for a real merry-go-round." Goodbye dear, delightful juveniles, and tell them at home what a

day you have had. Farewell, perspiring and equally pleased pedestrians. You have had your fun, your whooping and holloaing, and a hard run; and if you have somewhat driven hounds off their heads at the beginning of the day, the M.F.H. does not grudge you your amusement, and no more should we.

There are sandwiches now to eat, cigars to smoke, and maybe a flask or two to be consulted during four miles of jog-jogging along the hard high-road before the gate of a field is opened and we turn in. Two more fields, two more gates, then a line of fir-trees on top of a gentle rise. The M.F.H. pulls up; a mounted farmer, on whose land we are standing, says: "Please tell the gentlemen not to make a noise." The first whipper-in steals forward, and we see him disappear round the fir-trees. They grow just inside the cover-fence of a crack gorse which harbours, as a rule, "the old customer" who has three times defeated hounds. We advance on it now. The second whipper-in is scuttling away to his old corner; the Master is bending forward, horn in hand, in the act of waving his hounds into cover, when, loud and shrill, a whistle rings out from the far side. A twang of the horn, and, keeping well clear of the fences, the M.F.H. with the pack at his horse's heels, gallops on round the covert. Well in the centre of the field beyond the gorse is the first whipper-in. That functionary is purple in the face, screaming vigorously, and scooping away with his cap. Hounds fairly fly towards him. "Hold hard, *all of you!*" roars the Master, turning short round upon us, and looking as if he was going to eat the lot of us,—*"Hold hard,*



DOING IT THOROUGHLY.

Old Gent. "I say, my little man, you should always hold your pony together going up-hill, and over ploughed land!"

Young Nimrod. "All right, old cock! don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs! There's my man by the hay-stack with my second horse."

(Drawn by John Leech.)



THE NEW HUNTER.

"Well, Charley! How do you like your new pony?" "Oh! pretty well, thank you, uncle, only I'm afraid he's hardly up to my weight, and he rushes so at his fences."

(Drawn by John Leech.)

confound you, and let them settle!" He has no time for more. His horse whips short round, and lays himself out. He may put his horn—anywhere he pleases; we're away now, and "devil take the hindmost."

The first fence, half-wall, half-bank, must be nothing, for hounds don't seem to rise at it, just to float over it; so it's hardly worth taking a pull at that, but some stones rattle wickedly as half a score of folk charge it abreast. Beyond is a great stretch of grass dotted with furze bushes, and hounds are now more than half-way across it, while their shrill notes tantalisingly come back to us on the light breeze. There is a stream in the bottom. Look where you're going! Well over! Forrard away! A wall fronts us, beyond it a road; and another wall then before the fields are reached. The little bitches swing over road and walls, and now are crashing through a field of turnips—the only bit of tillage we shall see to-day. There is no time to lose. On and off the road where it lies before you! Ha! their heads are up in the turnips! He has turned short to get on to good going on the headland, but Artful has it up along the side of the fence. Some intuition has brought the Master there, too. Twang, twang, twang—forrard, forrard, forrard! In front rises a high bank, stone-faced to the top, furze and blackthorn growing on it, but here and there a salient place in the growth. My spot lies right in front, and with an effort we are up and over, but drop into a queer sort of hole with briars and furze filling it pretty thickly, out of which we scramble still "connected"—thanks be to

Diana. Repairing damages while crossing the next field at speed, I see that there are now but five men and two ladies in the field with hounds, which after crossing one more high fence, swing sharp to the right. The country after that is easy, and how the bitches do fly across it! They dart from field to field, for our fox has his point in view, and is making it unhindered by enemies. What a lucky evening! There are no dogs about; we pass near no houses; and our fox, generally running by the side of a fence, avoids the cattle in the fine grass fields across which we are making such pleasant progress. Our Master's cheers of encouragement have ceased; the thing is getting serious. I heard him say, "Come up, you brute!" at that last fence, and that good horse certainly leaves a leg behind him at the next one. We pass close by the walls of an old ivy-covered tower, one of Ireland's ruined castles, situated on a green knoll, and some wheeling sheep direct my eyes to a speck smoothly ascending the opposite slope. "Tally-ho!" I whisper to the M.F.H., for the going is good on the short, crisp turf, and I can ride alongside him. "Where? Ah! I have him now, and we ought to catch him," he replies.

Five minutes later, when hounds seem to be growing very dim and small, we throw open a gate and find ourselves at the junction of four roads, with the pack nosing about in all directions, busy but puzzled. Our huntsman holds his hand up. A check at last. Out comes my watch—thirty-two minutes up to this; and what a fog goes up from the panting horses, though now there are only five here present!

The Master, after one slight pause of intent observation, jogs quietly up to the straight road in front, throws a gate open, and touches his horn; when but half-way across the field the bitches dart forward with thrilling cry, followed by his hearty cheer, and we fling out our "Well done's!" at the clever cast.

I think the pace becomes even faster now, or is it that one begins to "move on one's horse" to get that fine, bounding gallop out of him that pleased one so much half an hour ago. He jumps as boldly and freely as ever; but I confess to a feeling of relief when we see a purple-brown line rising high in front of us not very far off. It is the screen round the demesne wall of which we saw so much in the morning, and it becomes a question whether our fox can reach it or no. Ten minutes more decides it. But what a lot can happen in ten minutes! The Master's horse has refused twice; my steed's forehead band is plastered with mud; a friend has described an aerial flight through his horse "chesting" a bank, and his hat is fairly "concertina'd," but he looks happy nevertheless! The bitches, however, are enjoying themselves amazingly, springing up at the fences as if propelled by some new power, and dashing through the small enclosures we are now traversing with their hackles erect. We are close to the high wall now, and with a scramble and "slither" we light on the road outside it just in time to see hounds swarm on to a little object that is turning in towards the lodge gates. Who-whoop! They have killed him not three hundred yards from the spot on which they despatched

their morning fox, and inside the walls we break him up on the grass.

"It's a five-mile point if it's an inch," says the Master. "Forty-seven minutes was the time," I announce. "Only one slight check," adds the M.F.H.; "a good gallop, I think! Does any one want to draw again?" For now the avenue is full of people. No voice is raised for continuance, so, pleased and happy, we turn for our homes, nor do our ways seem long, for what sings the wise rogue Autolycus:—

"Jog on, jog on the footpath way
And merrily hent the stile-a :
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a."

CHAPTER XXI

HUNTING, ANCIENT AND MODERN—A SMOKING-ROOM PALAVER

I AM afraid that although I have always considered myself to be, if anything, rather optimistic in my ideas on the subject of the future of fox-hunting, and inclined to take a more roseate view of the present than some of my contemporaries and nearly all of my seniors, yet it is coming home to me that certain youthful friends begin to find reminiscences of the past somewhat wearisome. They hold that the easy and luxurious conditions under which they pursue their favourite pastime contrast favourably with the hard times of an older day, and that the evils of wire, shooting syndicates, and trebly increased expense are almost counterbalanced by the rapidity of the whole business, the society of ladies out hunting, and the "smartness" of everything connected with the chase.

The difficulties of the old system, which were looked upon as pleasures by the heroes of old who overcame them, simply appal many of the young ones who read of them ; and lately I heard "ingenuous youth" declare that, in his belief, the sport of the grandfathers of my generation was only "mucking after a fox with

a pack of tow-rowing brutes that couldn't go fast enough to keep themselves warm," and, for his part, he "wouldn't have been bothered with it."

This, it is true, was after dinner, when the wheels of conversation had been oiled, and, the ladies having retired to bed, the talk, as usual, fell upon fox-hunting.

"You say," pursued this twentieth-century philosopher, "that it has always fascinated you to hear the old Master relate how his father used to wait with his hounds on the lee-side of a wild, heathery hill for the day to break that he might drag up to his fox, and you profess to find a spice of romance and poetry in such an unchristianlike proceeding." (Here I nodded and puffed away vigorously.) "That seems to me awful rot, if you'll excuse my saying so," went on this Philistine. "Where on earth did the fun come in? I suppose the old man got up about four o'clock, pitch dark, on a cold winter's morning; shaved overnight, I suppose; for they all shaved then; wore pigtails, too, I fancy; dressed by candle-light, no lamps in those days—I say! think of the misery of getting into breeches and a pair of tight boots by candle-light!"

"They weren't such asses as to wear them tight then," I growled.

"Breakfasted by candle-light! Ugh! what a dismal proceeding!" he continued; "and then jog-jogging on in the black dark (sleet or rain, too, perhaps) for miles over bad roads—and they must have been pretty bad then; with a cheery old wait under the lee of your romantic hillside for an hour or so at the end of it! Not good enough, I call it!"

“Hang it!” I exclaimed, hotly, “at your age can’t you understand the sport and intense interest of the whole thing, when the day did break? Old Mr. John Watson, I daresay, wasn’t much older than you at the time. Can’t you understand the pleasure of seeing the hounds spread out and try? The delight when some favourite opened on the drag and the others coming to him endorsed his success? Can’t you realise the excitement as the drag grew stronger and they drew up to him? Surely Somerville has been quoted often enough! Here is the volume and the passages:—

“Ere yet the morning peep
Or stars retire from the first blush of day,
With thy far-echoing voice alarm thy pack.

. . . See! how they range
Dispers’d, how busily this way and that
They cross, examining with curious nose
Each likely haunt. Hark! on the drag I hear
Their doubtful hotes, preluding to a cry.

. . .
They push, they strive: while from his kennel sneaks
The conscious villain.”

“No poetry! Why, man, that’s a classic! I never see those words in print ‘Hark! on the drag I hear!’ without a thrill shooting through me.”

“Oh, I know!” rejoined my tormenter, “that’s all in Jorrocks, and I’ve read it years ago—read it till I’m sick of it. Read *Soapey Sponge*, too! Do you remember what Jack Spraggon said of old Scamperdale? Here, find me the book, and I’ll read it! Here it is!

Jack and Soapey are talking about getting to the meet at Dallington Burn Cross Roads:—

“‘How far?’ asked Sponge.

“‘Good 20 miles,’ replied Jack; ‘it’s 15 from us, it’ll be a good bit more from here.’”

“‘His lordship will lay out overnight, then?’ observed Sponge.

“‘Not he,’ replied Jack; ‘takes better care of his sixpences than that. Up in the dark, breakfast by candle-light, grope our ways to the stable and blunder along the deep lanes, and through all the bye-roads in the country—get there somehow or another.’

“‘Keen hand!’ observed Sponge.

“‘MAD!’ replied Jack.”

—and with that my young friend closed the book with a bang and looked up with the air of one who has scored a point.

“No!” he resumed, “I can’t see the pleasure or fun of these proceedings. Look what a contrast nowadays! Suppose that conversation between Sponge and Spraggon to take place in these times:—

“‘What distance?’ says Sponge.

“‘Twenty miles!’ says Spraggon.

“Sponge rings the bell for Spigot and orders his motor to be round at 10.30 to-morrow.

“Or, if Spraggon had said the meet was at a bad place, Sponge would have buzzed off in his motor to meet Mr. Puffington’s hounds in the next country. Also Jawleyford, though he hated putting up Sponge’s piebald hack, would have had no objection to taking in his motor. So, you see, modern civilisation has a few advantages where hunting is concerned.”

“From more ‘advantages of modern civilisation’ may hunting long be spared!” I fervently replied.

“Barbed wire, awful crowds, fields that give no hounds a chance, wages up to treble what they were forty years ago, artificial manures, South African millionaires, shooting syndicates of plutocrats, mobs of horse-dealers who turn out seven or eight horses daily and give a ‘fiver’ to the Hunt—such are some of the *advantages* I have seen and heard of; and I think we could do without many more! You talk about the cheeriness and great sociability of modern times out hunting, of the number of ladies who hunt, &c., &c., but looking at the matter purely from a hunting point of view, remember this—*that hounds would do better if there were no field at all*, and I believe every pack would be considerably improved if they could go out several times in the season unattended, except by the Hunt establishment, and find and hunt their fox, when I’d engage they’d kill him pretty often and seldom would have their heads up.”

“Oh, I know what you’d like!” said young Up-to-date. “Ten or a dozen out, all told, all of the severe order of sportsmen, hack on to the meet and arrive half an hour too soon, then sit round like a lot of old owls looking at the hounds, pretending you know them all, and talking of this one and that, their fathers and mothers, and great-grandmothers. Surely it’s a lot jollier and more sociable to go out and meet a host of nice people with squadrons of pretty girls to talk to the heaps of Johnnies to chaff and tell you all the last good stories?”

“I think I like to meet plenty of my fellow-creatures out hunting, too,” I meekly replied. “And also like ladies to talk to and to look at if they *are* pretty ;

but I like to meet people who have come out to enjoy a fox-hunt, and not to show themselves and their clothes. I like to hear a good story, too; but don't want it told to me just as hounds have found their fox, or just when they have checked, which was the time chosen to inflict a yarn upon me the last day I was out. But my ideal field is composed of just about a hundred souls, all, except the grooms, bent on seeing as much of the hunt as they can, each in the manner to which he is best accustomed. That number is, I think, small enough for comfort, but large enough to please the eye sufficiently. I'm afraid I take too much pleasure in the humours of the chase to come up to your notion of the 'severe order of sportsman,' and, great nuisance as a crowd is, the fun one sees when these mobs are out is, to me, some very slight compensation for the harm they do."

"Well!" replied my companion, "one certainly does see some very strange creatures on a big day, and hear a good many comical things said, and it is rather a relief to have a little room in the afternoon when they have cut away to catch their specials. But, you know, you could never carry on hunting if a lot more folk didn't hunt nowadays than used to come out. Poultry claims, damages, and wire funds have to be reckoned with everywhere, and expenses all round have increased tremendously."

"That's true enough," was my answer, "but remember that where we hear of most complaints in England the expenses have been increased by these very crowds and their behaviour. No; looking at it from a social point of view, I am disposed to think that things were

pleasanter when folk stayed more at home and welcomed what strangers came to pitch their hunting camp in the county, and met also at some border fixture the neighbours from the adjoining Hunt. Nowadays, in many countries, if you sally out to look at a neighbouring pack, you find yourself shadowed with a view to an attack on your purse under the new rules, although you are ready and willing to put up any horse or man that wishes to hunt with your own hounds. Such changes, necessary though they may be, do not, to my mind, make hunting pleasanter than in the days of my youth.

"By the by," I resumed, "you said something about rapidity or pace not very long ago. I'll admit your motor can leave my dogcart standing still; but did you mean to suggest that you think runs are faster now than they were twenty, thirty, forty, or ninety years ago? because if you did you fall into an error only to be excused by your youth and inexperience."

"I feel crushed, of course—simply flattened," was the calm reply to my harangue; "but don't you think they are?"

"I've good reason to know they are *not*," said I. "The chronicles of the chase are pretty accurate and voluminous about sport in the Midlands of England at all events, and there were plenty of records of runs in the beginning of the last century that for pace and distance will surpass anything that is done nowadays. The late Lord Wilton, who, when he rode on the flat, was allowed to be a wonderful judge of pace, is said to have given his opinion that they used to go faster over the Quorn country when he first went to

live at Egerton Lodge than they did in later years, and I have just seen in my December *Baily* that a well-known sportsman believes the pace was better in the Shires in 'Nimrod's' day than now, and that they required faster horses in those days, when they had no railroads and no wire-fencing to check the progress of the horse, and no artificial manures or deeply drained land to spoil scent for the hound. Everything connected with the chase was slower, of course, in the infancy of fox-hunting. 'When each horse wore a crupper, each squire a pigtail!'—but that is not the time which we ancients consider to have been the halcyon period of the chase. Do you imagine that any men go better to hounds now than those who formed 'Nimrod's' collection of 'The Hard Riders of England'? Though I grant you that treble the *number* of first-rate men are riding to hounds in the present day. Then, as to hounds, I fancy most M.F.H.'s of to-day would be glad to possess the pack that 'The Squire' brought with him into Leicestershire in 1817; those that Mr. Foljambe sold in 1845, or Lord Henry Bentinck's pack a decade later; while, to come to more recent days, I imagine that the Duke of Beaufort has not much improved on the pace or hunting qualities of the pack with which he hunted his fox in the marvellous Greatwood run of 1871.

"Money seems the test of everything nowadays," I went on. "Well, in the olden time, as you would call it, they gave bigger prices for their hunters than they do in this wonderful twentieth century, and, excepting the extraordinary prices given for packs in 1909, often as much for their hounds. Forty-one years

ago, when Lord Stamford gave up the Quorn, Mr. Clowes gave him 2,000 guineas for the hounds. One of his horses fetched 520 guineas at the hammer, two more 500 guineas apiece. One fetched 480 guineas, while 460, 450, 420, and 400 guineas (twice) were given for others, and five more went for 300 and over. The price for the pack, of course, was not by any means a record, as it is termed nowadays.

"Big as some of these prices seem, they were common enough in Leicestershire once on a day; and I merely mentioned them to show that if money 'makes the mare to go' she ought to have travelled faster in the olden time. But horses and hounds are as good as ever they were, the former as well ridden, the latter as well hunted, I make no doubt, though few, I fear, in comparison with the great multitudes who go out take much notice of their hunting, and it is there that the sport has not improved with age.

"The wire question, of course," I added, "is the one that may bring the great sport to an untimely end, for the fastest of you don't seem to be able to do much with that, and I imagine that £ s. d. is the only solution; but it may be (and how fervently do all sportsmen desire it); it may be that good times are nearer to the farmers than is generally imagined; that wealth will flow 'back to the land,' and the farmers themselves will again become a strong component of the hunting-field. Then will the wire cease to be a danger, and no longer will the ancient fogies sigh for the days of old."

My young friend yawned, and the talk drifted into other channels.

That question concerning the pace of hounds which he had raised has often been debated. Many people hold that hounds run faster now than they did in the days of our ancestors. When writing recently on the subject of great runs, I read some of the pages to a friend who had dropped in for a chat, and he remarked, apropos of the time of Mr. Bell's Galway run in 1906 and Mr. John Watson's run from Corballis, "By Jove! how astonished our ancestors would have been to see hounds flying over the country at such a pace." But when thinking the matter over afterwards it came to my mind that this question of "pace," which so many put before everything else nowadays, is one that, when studied, may give results that will considerably surprise the up-to-date sportsman, who believes implicitly that the hounds and horses of the twentieth century are as superior in point of speed to those of the beginning of the nineteenth as the motor-car that takes him to covert is to the "Tilbury" that carried his grandfather. But it was as far back as the end of the eighteenth century that Mr. Meynell's two foxhounds were beaten at Newmarket, "four miles from the town-end Rubbing-House to the Rubbing-House at the Starting Post of the Beacon Course," by Mr. Barry's Bluecap and Wanton, who completed the four miles in "a few seconds above eight minutes." Now, Mr. Meynell was held to have the best pack of foxhounds in England; he was a great houndman and a scientific fox-hunter, so that it is not likely that his Richmond and the nameless bitch who ran with him would have been kept in

his kennel had they been able completely to run away from the rest of the pack. It is fair, therefore, to infer that Mr. Meynell must have had several hounds not much inferior to his selected in point of speed; yet his champion was beaten quite 120 yards by Bluecap and Wanton, who ran very close together all through, so that we may apply the same argument to the Cheshire hounds.

I do not know what part of Yorkshire was hunted by the eccentric Colonel Thornton when he owned his famous bitch Merkin, who ran a four-mile trial in *seven minutes and half a second*. Madcap, two years old, challenged all England over the same distance for £500, and her brother, Lounger, did the same at four years old. This challenge was accepted, and a bet of 200 guineas, to run Mr. Meynell's Pillager; but when Lounger was seen at Tattersall's by "many of the first sportsmen, his bone and form were so capital that the parties thought it proper to pay forfeit."

It has been said, of course, that in those days they did not understand "clocking," and that the timing was probably inaccurate; but the Bluecap match was for 500 guineas, and it is certain that at New-market there would be many sportsmen endeavouring at least to time the match correctly.

Merkin was sold in 1795 for four hogsheads of claret; the seller to have two couples of her whelps. The fashion, or craze, for hound-trials lasted for some time, but died out at the beginning of the last century. Still, it proved that our grandfathers were not unmindful of the speed of hounds. It may be objected that these hound-trials in no way represent the speed

of hounds over a country intersected by stiff fencing, and, of course, this is so; still, they did show that the animals who ran were not the tow-rowing, muddling brutes we hear so much about; and, turning to other records, we may find further statistics to give food for reflection.

Fast as are some modern runs, I read in the chapter on Warwickshire Hunting in Sir Humphrey de Trafford's *Foxhounds of Great Britain*, of the great Epwell run in 1807 during Mr. Corbet's mastership, when his hounds ran from Epwell to Burton-on-the-water, deep in the Heythrop country—a point of twenty miles, while the distance run was thirty-five, and this was done in four and a half hours, which, for sustained pace, is not bad. But a few years later "Nimrod" recorded the great Ditchley run with this pack, when he declares that over the big fields at Ladbroke he had great difficulty in keeping pace with these hounds "although mounted on a race-horse in training." I have no record by me of the time of Lord Redesdale's great Tar Wood run with the Heythrop in 1847; but more than fifty years have passed since Anstruther Thomson brought off the Charndon Common run mentioned in his *Reminiscences*—found in Claydon Woods and lost near Merton—*sixteen miles, no check; time one hour and twenty minutes*; no one saw the end, but Mr. George Drake went the longest. This is the fastest *long* run that I ever heard of, and is most authentic.

In Mr. John Hawke's pamphlet, *The Meynellian Science, or Fox-hunting upon System*, he tells us that Mr. Meynell "considered the first qualities in a fox-

hound to be fine noses and stout runners"; his object was "to combine strength with beauty, steadiness with high mettle. His idea of perfect shape was short backs, open bosoms, straight legs and compact feet. His idea of *perfection* in hounds in chase consisted of their being true guides in hard running, and close and patient hunters on a cold scent combined with stoutness; overrunning the scent and babbling were considered the greatest faults."

In those days hounds were cast seldom in comparison with the practice of our own time, for the sufficient reason that they seldom required it. This was in some measure owing to the superior scent-holding properties of the land before scientific farming, heavy drainage, and artificial manuring came into vogue. Even in a tillage country hounds had a better chance, for they did not plough into the fences then, but left a good broad headland, which was almost invariably travelled by the fox. But the fine noses of the hounds themselves and steady line-hunting qualities helped fully as much as the state of the land to do away with the necessity for much casting during a day's sport, and this steady, relentless pursuit was doubtless the reason that they were able to cover great distances in a time that even in these flying days cause astonishment. But it is true that they were in the habit of hunting stouter foxes then, and therefore these long runs came more frequently. Possibly, with a burning scent, we have hounds nowadays that could run away from a pack of Bluecaps, Wantons, or Merkins; but, unless the hound-trial and stop-watch is to be called into play

again, I do not see how this can be stated with any certainty. In Whyte-Melville's *Inside the Bar* he makes old Squire Plumtree, in an after-dinner argument, thus deliver himself:—

“Haste is not always speed. A man may be in a devil of a hurry and yet slip back two paces for every one he advances. The same process that kills a hare will kill a fox—the keeping constantly at him, not the bustling him along best pace for ten or fifteen minutes. Now your hounds of the present day are always flashing over the scent into the next field. Either you waste a deal of valuable time by having to try back, or if your huntsman is as wild as his hounds, he gallops forward blowing his horn, makes a wide cast, and loses him altogether. Either way you destroy your own object.”

Those who have partaken of the delightful sport furnished by the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, and have participated in the pleasures of a run over the glorious, open moorland will, I think, understand the old Squire's meaning. You have acquired sufficient confidence in yourself and steed to ride boldly through the heather and moorland herbage, knee-deep though it be. You have got away well and are placed, much to your satisfaction, pretty close to hounds, and you mean to stay there. At first it seems a matter easy enough on a well-bred horse, who is not taking anything out of himself by pulling harder than is pleasant; for the pace even of those big hounds among the heather seems nothing alarming. A fast canter or steady hand-gallop, you think will suffice. But there is no *stopping* on a good scenting day on the moor, no pulling the horse together for a fence or a halting to open the gate, no diverging into the next field to get better going or to avoid the fence in front;

you are always hammering on. And after twenty minutes of such work it comes upon you that you may as well let your nag know you have a pair of spurs on; and it is only if you have to retrace your steps on the homeward journey over the same line that you get any idea of the great distance you have come in so short a time.

In the best *gallop* I ever enjoyed in my life—it was from Kiltorkan Gorse in Kilkenny to a point between Bessborough and Castletown where they killed—hounds *never checked*; that is, they never were spoken to; they “hovered” but wheeled and caught the scent up for themselves several times, no doubt, but there was no distinct pause. All the first part of the run was over a very easy, open country with low fences and walls, and many gaps through which the fox had generally passed. The point is nine and three-quarter miles, and the time was just five minutes over the hour. Owing to a thick, misty drizzle on the low hills near Huggenstown and Booliglass it was not easy to tell exactly how far they ran, but I fancy it must have been at least a mile and a half more. Now the great pace of this run was much talked of at the time, but the truth is that a great many folk, including the M.F.H., were left on the far side of the railway with a good deal of leeway to make up. As a matter of fact, there was no great difficulty in staying with hounds who never seemed to be “flying,” but never stopped “hammering on” in a manner I have not seen equalled since.

CHAPTER XXII

, CHANGES IN FOX-HUNTING

THE changes of which I write are not in the manner of conducting the pursuit of the fox, or in the "horses, hounds, and the system of kennel," but in the organisation and conduct of the affairs of the Hunt. This change has gradually been making itself felt; it has advanced rapidly within the last fifteen years, and recent events must soon force all who wish well to hunting to bestir themselves to meet it. So far back as 1834 "Nimrod" wrote: "We consider it rather inconceivable that, in the present depressed state of land property, either noblemen or private gentlemen should of themselves be expected or permitted to bear all the charge of hunting a country." And he proceeds to quote from a writer in the *New Sporting Magazine* of that year who does not—

"Anticipate the event of the total abolition of the sport, for it is the favourite sport of Englishmen, and that which a man likes best he will relinquish last. Still, with the exception of countries that boast their Cleveland, their Yarboroughs and Suttons, their Graftons, Beauforts, Rutlands, Fitzwilliams, Segraves, Middletons, and Harewoods—their great and sporting noblemen, in fact—we feel assured that, unless something be speedily arranged, half the packs in England

must either be curtailed of their fair proportion of sport or abolished altogether. This is not as it should be. Men are as fond of hunting, at least of riding to hounds, as ever; but though we feel we may be telling a disagreeable truth to many, the fact is that most men want to hunt for nothing. The day for this, however, is fast drawing to a close. The breed of country gentlemen who keep hounds—the Ralph Lambtons, the Farquharsons, the Assheton Smiths, the Villebois and Osbaldestons—are fast disappearing, in all probability never to be renewed. True that it is a fine, a proud sight to see an English country gentleman spending his income on his native soil, and affording happiness and amusement to his neighbours, receiving their respect and esteem in return, but we cannot help feeling that unless a man has one of those overwhelming incomes that are more frequently read of than enjoyed, it is hardly fair that the expenses of a sport that affords health and recreation to hundreds should fall upon his individual shoulders.”

It seems difficult to believe that this extract was written seventy-five years ago, so forcibly do its arguments come home to us in the year of grace 1909, when all hunting expenses have increased 20 per cent. Nothing, as a matter of fact, was very “speedily arranged,” but when the brave old squires whom the writer enumerates took the field no more, they left no successors to provide “health and recreation” free of charge in the districts over which they hunted. The proud sight of an English nobleman affording happiness and amusement to his neighbours, and in return “receiving their respect and esteem” (but no subscription) is, however, still to be witnessed in two parts of Yorkshire, in Lincolnshire, in Dorset, on the Welsh border, and in Scotland; but elsewhere the arrangement has been made, and subscription packs hunt every part of the kingdom.

The subscription lists of many of these packs should “in the present depressed state of land property,” be

studied with some attention by those who hunt with the hounds they are intended to support. It will generally be found that very large subscriptions are given by men who hunt very little, or not at all; but who, because they are landed proprietors, consider it their duty to support the county pack of hounds. The prospects of the landed gentry cannot be said to look very bright just now, and one is forced to consider if these subscriptions are likely to be maintained in the future—nay, to ask oneself if by any right we should expect them to be continued. If a landed proprietor is able to let any house or farm as a hunting-box, or to offer as an inducement to a tenant that there is “good hunting in the neighbourhood,” then, indeed, it may reasonably be expected of him to subscribe pretty liberally to the hounds; but, as the writer of 1834 remarked, “the fact is, most men want to hunt for nothing,” and when future subscription lists are read over and a small sum appears after the name of a county magnate, he may be voted a shabby fellow though he and his ancestors have been paying for the sport of others for several generations.

It is only just beginning to come home to some folks, who would be indignant if a neighbour offered to pay the rent of their shooting or fishing in Scotland for them, that they have practically been allowing other people to pay the greater share of the cost of an amusement which lasts them for five months in the year.

The matter is now dealt with in many English countries in a very business-like manner. Take, for instance, the Grafton—one of the historic countries

mentioned by the writer I have quoted—a private pack once maintained by the Duke of Grafton, but since 1895 a subscription one; lowest subscription, £35 per annum, payable in advance. We may be sure that this sum was not fixed without due deliberation; nor, when one considers the great reputation of the pack and of the country, does the amount appear excessive. In countries where second horses are essential, if we would see a day's sport fairly out, we must possess the sinews of war, and pay for our game pretty heavily. Every one understands that, but many are only beginning to realise that they have now got to pay for something beside their horses and the expenses of the stable. It was all very well once on a day—say, when Sir Richard Sutton ruled in Quorndon—for the flying sportsman to send his string up to Melton, “to stand at the sign of the ‘And in Pocket,’” as the groom in *Market Harborough* expressed it; and nothing more was expected. But, though there are said to be many more millionaires in the land nowadays than when Sir Richard flourished, somehow or other we hear of none who are willing to spend £10,000 per annum on hunting a country at their own expense. South African gold dust may be freely sprinkled on the Turf. Not very much of it is bestowed on the hunting-field for the benefit of others.

It has come to pass, then, that all who hunt in the English Midlands are given to understand that they have to pay for the maintenance of the Hunt, and what that means the secretary's accounts will no doubt explain. The subscription is fixed at the minimum reconcilable with the expenses of maintenance, and the

amount realised, I believe, usually suffices for so doing.

But it is where hunting is not so fashionable, and the number of subscribers smaller, that the matter is difficult to deal with. Expenses increase yearly, but the old big subscribers, who very likely hunt less than the others, cannot be expected to increase their donations, and difficulties very soon begin to arise—begin to arise because certain good folk cannot pay more for the amusement of others who want to play at their expense. Surely it is not a very pleasant thing for Smith to feel that he is allowing Brown, Jones, and Robinson, for neither of whom has he any particular regard, to pay the lion's share of Smith's hunting expenses. It has been suggested, indeed, that all two-days-a-week hunts should fix £25 as the lowest sum for their Hunt subscription. Were the custom established, it is said that no one would miss the money, that the mean man would be "caught," and the generous non-hunting supporter often relieved of a burden.

In those countries where most of the hunting folk have for many years had their hunting practically for nothing, thanks to the liberality of some nobleman or a few territorial magnates, it is reported that the change that has now come to pass is met in a spirit of great despondency, and anything more than a £5 note is with extreme difficulty extracted. Now, to pay but £5 for about fifty days' hunting, which is the magnificent contribution of several acquaintances of mine, appears such a singularly parsimonious contribution to the war-chest that I am in hopes they may

be induced to enlarge it when they realise that other folk who are none too well off must be paying largely for their amusement.

One of the changes that time has brought, besides the increase of expenses and the decrease of private packs, is the extraordinary increase in the number of ladies in the hunting-field, and it is said in many quarters that they should subscribe the fixed amount just the same as mere men, and that from £1 to £5 towards a fowl fund is by no means an adequate sum to pay for several days' hunting per week. There is great difference of opinion on the subject. "Let there be no compulsion in the matter," say some of the old-fashioned ones; "let it be our privilege to pay for the fair! What matter if they do exceed the sterner sex in numbers (as is very often the case)? If they will only learn what grass-seeds and springing wheat look like, and avoid them!—if they will only practise silence at a check, difficult though it may be for them at any time—if they will only do these things, why, 'Let 'em all come' gratis, free, and for nothing, and the more the merrier!"

The changes in the hunting-field are not only economic. If we attempt to contrast our present customs and fashions with those of forty years ago, we find that many differences have grown up.

The "merry spring-time," which lately brought us such jovial items as blizzards of hail and snow, nightly frosts and cutting north-easterly gales, has also cut short our hunting season a good deal earlier than usual, for some reason which I have not quite been able to discover, unless it be that the practically uninter-

rupted spell of open weather since November 1st has given us all—hounds, horses, and human beings—enough. I am not thinking of any pack in particular. Some have closed already, and most hunts in Ireland did not go on into April at all. This is altogether different from the practice which obtained in the days of my youth, when it was the universal custom to try to “kill a May fox”; but although the hunting world is pretty conservative, its manners and customs have altered, and are still changing. No doubt there is often a very good reason for the change, but it sometimes affects the antiquated sportsman rather sadly.

It is safe to say that in Ireland we are no more likely again to hunt a May fox than to behold a pigtail, though there is said to be a fashionable hankering at present after ancient English customs and costumes. It was not my happiness to have come into the world when the “hirsute appendage” flourished, but I have seen a fox killed in the first week of May, and I have no desire to do so again, believing that all fox-hunting should close by the end of April.

But the changes in the hunting-field which I myself have seen are so numerous that it would take up a good deal of paper to recount them. A few, however, which occur to me may serve to amuse readers who are still on the sunny side of middle age. For my first day's hunting last week I travelled a very long distance to the meet in a motor-car, the most comfortable, I think, that I ever drove in. We had twenty-nine miles to get over before we reached the fixture and a fair in the village at the gates to get through at

starting, and those who have experience of Irish fairs will understand that the condition of the streets might be termed congested. My host allowed himself two hours, and we did it easily, with lots of time to spare, overtaking horses and traps on their way to the trysting-place at least two miles before we reached it. Certainly a most comfortable means of transit was that motor-car—so noiseless and so delightfully smooth. She rose the hills with a droning hum like the buzz of a distant threshing machine, and glided down them accompanied by the low, rhythmical clink of machinery, but at times quite silently.

Turning over the pages of an old diary, I see that in the last week of March, 1866, I “drove to the meet on Mr. M——’s coach. Most of the fellows on the drag wore hunting-caps. Three other coaches at the meet.” I suppose, being a youth at that time, I envied the wearers of the hunting-caps the possession of those sensible articles of headgear. It is true that my driver of the motor-car the other day was similarly attired as to his head, but being the M.F.H. that was a matter of course. Who else wears a hunting-cap now?—unless, perchance, the Field Master (an excellent custom, I think)—and who drives his coach to the meet at the present day? Not many folk, I fancy, even on the Saxon side of St. George’s Channel! And it is now some years since I saw a coach at a meet of foxhounds in Ireland, though it was a common enough sight at one time. *Tempora mutantur!*

The hunting-cap lingered longer on the brows of sportsmen in Ireland than in England, despite the fact that it was the fatal accident in Co. Kilkenny to Henry

Marquis of Waterford, in 1859, that caused the hunting-cap to go out of fashion. It was thought at the time that a tall hat would have acted as a buffer and saved the neck, for the hard, unyielding hunting-cap was only slightly indented by the fall. Be that as it may, most Irish squires who were Lord Waterford's contemporaries stuck to their hunting-caps for several years after his lamented death, and after they had become unfashionable in England. They had not quite gone out, however, when Whyte-Melville wrote *Market Harborough*, for readers of that delightful work will remember that Mr. John Standish Sawyer made his first appearance in Leicestershire in a cap, and went so well in a "merry-go-rounder" with the Pytchley, that pretty Miss Cissy Dove caused his heart to thrill by saying "We all agreed that the cap had the best of it." In Leech's hunting sketches—"Pictures from Life and Character in the possession of Mr. Punch"—we can clearly trace the wane of the popularity of the cap, though I think our dear old friend Mr. Briggs, save when out with the Brighton Harriers, is always represented in the hunting-field wearing the headgear to which his wife took such exception when it was first sent home.

Leech was so close an observer of life and character that his sketches are valuable as showing the changes of costume in England during the period in which he worked. He gives us the gradual progress of crinolines from the mildly accentuating bustle to the unmeaning monstrosity of hoops; he shows us the advent of the peg-top trouser, the birth of the knickerbocker, and from his pictures we learn how

fox-hunters were clad between the years of 1842 and 1865. We notice in these hunting sketches a hunting boot that is now almost as extinct as the pigtail, but which I remember very well; these boots were called "Napoleons," were usually made of some patent leather and covered the knee-cap, but were cut away behind.

"Don't have Napoleons," a boot-maker in one of Leech's sketches is saying to a seated customer whose calf he is about to measure. "Have tops, sir! Yours is a beautiful leg for a top boot, sir! Beautiful leg, sir! Same size all the way down, sir!"

The difficulty of dealing with a limb of muscular proportions when constructing a top boot is also noticed in *Market Harborough*, when Mr. Sawyer is fitting himself out with a couple of pairs in Oxford Street, for his campaign in the Shires:—

"'Very muscular gentleman!' says the foreman, passing his tape round Mr. Sawyer's calf. 'I could have made you, now, a particular neat Provincial boot; but with this pattern it is exceedingly difficult to obtain the correct appearance for the flying countries. You wouldn't like a pair of Napoleons, I presume. Very fashionable just now, sir. All the gentlemen wear them in the Vale of Aylesbury.'"

Another writer on hunting matters at about the same period says: "Of boots there are just two sorts—those that protect the mechanism of the knee and those that don't;" but it is a long time since I have seen a boot that "protected the mechanism of the knee" worn by a gentleman in the hunting-field. Even in my early hunting days Napoleons were not fashionable, and were usually worn by our elders—men who seemed, no doubt, to us to be tottering on

the brink of the grave. What sings Egerton Warburton?—

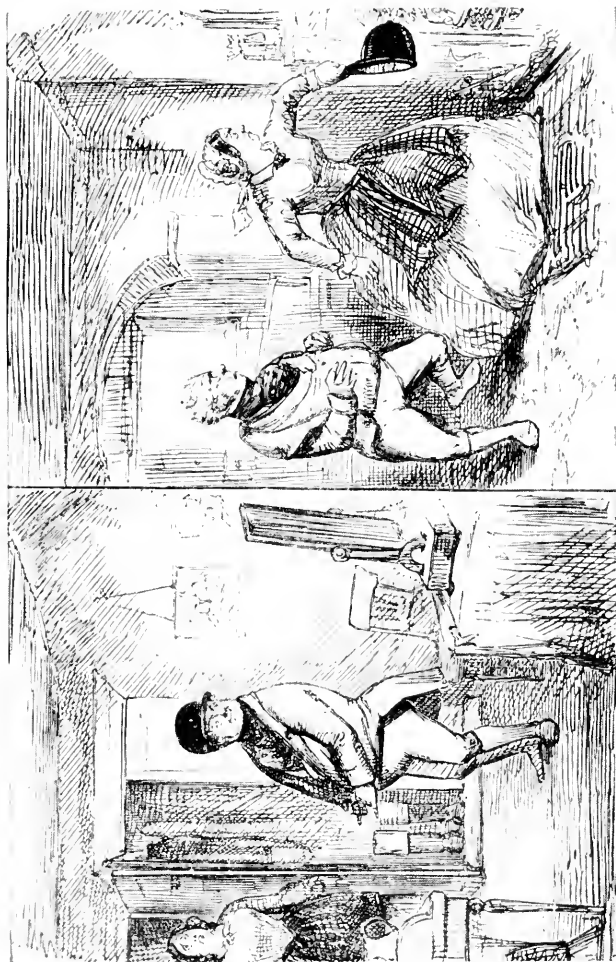
“Buckskin's the only fit wear for the saddle,
Hats for Hyde Park, but a cap for the chase;
In boots of black leather let fishermen paddle,
The calves of a fox-hunter white ones encase.”

It is a long time also since I saw a white top worn by a gentleman, though I can remember when that colour was *de rigueur* and surmounted a boot whose great beauty was to be as wrinkled as a concertina; I have seen many fashions in the shades of tops since that day, though. It would appear from the verses of Egerton Warburton that he was one of the innovators who made the velvet cap fashionable and caused it again to supersede the heavy, quaintly shaped, tall hat which we see in the pictures of Alken:—

“Old Wiseheads complacently smoothing the brim,
May jeer at my velvet and call it a whim.
They may think in a cap little wisdom there dwells.
They may say they who wear it should wear it with bells.
But when broad brim lies flat,
I will answer him pat,
Oh! who but a crackskull would ride in a hat?”

From our very earliest hunting pictures, however, it would appear that a hunting-cap of dimensions equalling a fireman's helmet and something of the same shape surmounted the brows of our ancestors; so fashions come and go and come again, and “nothing is new under the sun.”

As regards the change in other articles of attire, I can recollect when almost every hunting man en-



PREPARATIONS FOR HUNTING.

Mr. Briggs' hunting-cap comes home, but that is really a thing Mrs. Briggs can not and *will* not put up with.

(*Drawn by John Leech.*)

veloped his neck in a blue or blue bird's-eye scarf while some of the ancients tied theirs in a bow, and to this fashion Mr. T. C. Garth held till the end of his fifty years' mastership in 1902. The blue bird's-eye with a scarlet coat is now as extinct as the velvet cap. The Crimean War and its hardships, it is said, did away with much of the very tight and shiny species of dandyism in the hunting-field and elsewhere. Many of our heroes wore beards when they returned from the shores of the Black Sea; and, retiring from the Service after the war, remained unshorn ever afterwards, to the great wrath and disgust of an elder generation, who would suffer no growth on the face but what Brother Jonathan terms a "side-whisker," and had a prejudice against wearing that of any length. "It's a strange thing," I once heard one of the old school remark, "that Johnny Osborne can go and win races with all that hair on his face. I wish to G——d he'd cut it off!"

In provincial countries, certainly, it was a common thing to wear brown cord breeches with a red coat, but, though I regret to learn that there has been a considerable increase in the number of "Rat-catchers" since the Boer War, I have only seen one instance of khaki-coloured legs being thrust into top-boots—a sensible practice enough, one which is most comfortable, and was common long ago. Scarlet single-breasted coat, brown Bedford cords, mahogany-coloured top-boots, and a hunting-cap: such was the kit of many a well-known sportsman when I first went hunting—the dress, in fact, of many huntsmen and hunt servants of the present day. Leathers had

then gone out of fashion for a time, and white Bedford cords were more in vogue than cotton cords, or at least were considered smarter, but moleskins were seldom seen.

I think if a man had appeared in the hunting-field on a hog-maned horse at the time I speak of he would have been considered a lunatic. The only animal ever hogged was a butcher's pony, and no end of trouble was taken to make the mane of the hunter "lie." I well remember the mane of a horse being removed to get rid of ringworm, which covered the animal's neck. Dire was the distress of the owner, who could not bring the horse out till his mane was grown; and no one seemed to think it strange that he did not do so. Hunters' tails were seldom docked in those days, and the amount of dirt some of the heavy bang tails would bring into a stable after a wet day's hunting was surprising.

White gloves, cleaned with breeches-paste or pipe-clay were in vogue at that time—a senseless fashion it always seemed to me—and I recollect a bit of scandal being raised when a lady was observed to bear the impress of a white hand on her habit about the region of the waist, when she emerged from a wood which hounds had been drawing. But there were so many white gloves in the field that the youngsters could not "spot" the favoured swain! There were few ladies hunting then, though a certain number rode to the meets and saw hounds throw off; yet it was not then "the thing" for a lady to hunt, and very few really rode hard to hounds. I doubt if there were fifty in the United Kingdom! I speak of the sixties, or at least from 1865 to 1870, when I

hunted a certain amount on both sides of St. George's Channel.

"The world went very well then," I thought, but I can well remember that the old brigade said hunting was "dying out and couldn't go on." Perhaps the ladies revived it! Perhaps the old 'uns were mistaken, and meant that they were dying out! Wire, though, had begun to creep in. It was in 1868, I think (but certainly not later) that I saw the late Mr. Henry Briscoe, M.F.H., get a terrible fall over wire near Fiddown Station, Co. Kilkenny, from the effects of which he told me he never quite recovered. The wire on this occasion was run through some bushes in a gap on the roadside, and Mr. Briscoe wanted to get into the field to cast his hounds. The horse tried to brush through, and turned slowly over, crushing his rider, who, however, was able to ride home. Leech, in one of his hunting sketches in *Punch*, shows a bad accident from wire, where a sportsman is down and badly hurt apparently, and one of the Hunt servants is falling heavily close by. Now John Leech died in the year 1864. Still, wire was very rarely seen in Ireland till several years later. I was quite appalled when I returned to the country in 1877, after four years' absence, to see the progress it had made even then. It is many years since Whyte-Melville wrote in *Baily's Magazine* his verses, "Ware Wire," a protest to the farmers. His lines doubtless called attention to the evil, but could not, of course, be expected to check it or induce those he addressed to "Up with the timber and down with the wire." Money, which maketh the mare to go, even over a country that has been wired, can alone do that.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PLEA FOR THE OLD RED RAG, BEING AN INTERVIEW WITH JORROCKS'S GHOST

THE frost after last New Year was a desperately hard one and threatened long continuance. Happily, the threat was unfulfilled, but the time was dreary to me, though shooting, or rather, walking, with a gun, in search of evasive snipe or casual duck in unfrozen fen ditches, served to keep the weight down and the temper too. These expeditions brought one home weary, and seldom heavy laden, but always with keen anticipation of the dinner-hour.

In such hard times the frozen-out fox-hunter has no need to take thought for the morning. There is no "sending on" to be considered, and no early breakfast or start renders necessary a curtailment of the evening symposium in the smoking-room.

I must confess, then, to a lengthened sojourn in the depths of my favourite arm-chair on these cold evenings. The tobacco would sink low in the jar, and while the snow pattered lightly on the pane a bright copper kettle occasionally sang cheerily on the hob. On one particularly frosty night, when the daily papers had been thoroughly digested, it is pos-

sible that the latest novel might have kept one awake and alert by its exciting revelations of super-human cunning or skill displayed in the detection of crime; but I had no new novel, and fell back on a beloved old scarlet-bound volume, on the back of which time and hard usage have almost effaced the magic words *Handley Cross*.

No matter at what page one opens that delightful book, there is always something to amuse. That night I sat chuckling for the thousandth time over the humorous advice of the "Sporting Falstaff" to his "beloved 'earers," and, closing my eyes, began to ruminate thereon.

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Before long it somehow became apparent to me that some one had entered the room and was sitting in the arm-chair on the other side of the fire, which had been occupied in the earlier part of the evening by the partner of my joys and sorrows.

Not only that, but my visitor had evidently mixed himself some fairly strong "hot stopping," for assuredly the odour of lemon, sugar, boiling water, and, I think, whisky, filled my snuggerly. Curiously enough, I felt no sort of surprise, as I drowsily scanned my guest, who was attired in sky-blue evening coat lined with pink silk, canary-coloured shorts, and white silk stockings. His neckcloth and waistcoat were white, and a finely plaited shirt frill protruded like the fin of a perch.

He had a fine open countenance, and though his little turn-up nose and rather twisted mouth were not handsome, there was a combination of fun and

good-humour in his looks that pleased at first sight, and made one forget all the rest. On his head sat a bushy, nut-brown wig, worn for comfort and not deception.

Perhaps he seemed a trifle paler than when I last had seen him—my copy is a genuine first edition!—but possibly my strong reflecting reading lamp may have been responsible for the slight alteration in his rubicund complexion.

It was Mr. Jorrocks, of course.

My dear old friend seemed in excellent spirits, as he crossed his plump calves and elevated his jolly chin while he took a strong pull at his tumbler and smacked his lips heartily. “Dash my vig!” he exclaimed, “it *is* a thaw! Do believe you’ll ’unt to-morrow; I knows if I ’ad this country I’d ’ave a shy at it. I guessed there was a thaw on,” he continued, “for I ’eard the ghost of Gabriel Junks screamin’ before I came ’ere.”

“Before you came up, did you say?” I inquired drowsily.

“I said nothing about hup; I said *’ere*,” replied Mr. Jorrocks, frowning a little. “Don’t try to be so werry sharp, my friend, but pass along the Scotchman; good stuff that, but I still prefers the V.O.P.,” he remarked, as he measured out another jorum. “But, as I was sayin’, I’ll lay a guinea you ’unts to-morrow, and I ’opes you’ll ’ave a real good chevy, with a kill at the end on’t! ’Ere, let’s drink Fox-huntin’, the sport o’ kings, the image of war without its guilt, and only five-and-twenty per cent. of the danger.

“What sort of a country is it down—er—I mean

where you come from?" I asked, somewhat diffidently, when the toast had been duly honoured.

"Good country!" said Mr. J., briskly,—“good country! best in Hengland I should say, I mean”—he corrected, “*better* nor any in Hengland, Europe, Hasia, Hafrica, or Hamerica; not but what I sometimes gives a bit of a sigh for a duster on top of the Surrey 'ills or a chevy round Pinch-me-near Forest; but parts of the Helysian fields is good enough for any hangel; beats the cream of the Cut-me-downs 'ollow, I should say!”

"Big fields out?" I hazarded.

"Hawful crowds!" said my visitor; "perfect hosts, in fact! But room enough for all. Good chaps, most on 'em, too! Sportsmen? Real fliers, some of 'em! Fly over a comet as soon as not."

"Seen anything of Pigg?" I asked rather doubtfully.

"James is going strong," replied Mr. J., slightly to my surprise. "He's 'appy now he can have his 'cracks wi' 'ard Lambton and 'ard Sebright,' tho' he doesn't care a copper what he says to any on 'em, but we doesn't allow no cuss words. Even old Scamperdale never throws his tongue as he used to do, and Spraggon isn't 'untin' with us to do it for him," he added somewhat grimly.

"But it's 'stonishing how a real 'flying' country tones 'em all down. Some of the new-comers tried to hact up to their old reputation; but it wouldn't do, for there's no jostlin', no 'ustlin' in gateways, and no 'eadin' foxes. Why, we even 'as old Hassheton Smith so tame he'd almost feed out o' your 'and!

"No cussin' or swearin', no hindiscriminate 'ollerin'

allowed," he repeated, "and it would do your 'eart good to 'ear the music, for we generally 'as a scent, no tillage being permitted, and no top-dressin' wi' hartificial manures. It's the right country for music, and no mistake. Too much trumpetin', in fact, for some on us, but it's all werry pleasant and cheery!

"What about the 'ounds? Well, you know," said Mr. Jorrocks, with a chuck of his chin, "with such a concatenation o' talent there must be difference of opinion! I don't 'old with a big 'ound, no more does Will Goodall, nor the Squire; nor yet Sir Richard nor Lord 'Enery; but old John Warde and Mr. Horlock, why, they'd like to breed 'em as big as helephants! No matter! difference of opinion never alters friendship wi' us! Not but what I likes to talk these matters over, and some day I might tip some o' these twentieth-century chaps another Sporting Lector, for by all accounts they wants a bit o' teachin'. 'Elp yourself, and pass the bottle; the kettle's struck hup a new bile!

"Dash my vig! There's no colour like red, no sport like 'untin'! But what am I sayin'? 'No colour like mustard!' ought to be the cry down here nowadays, and those memorable words of John Jorrocks, M.F.H., 'ave 'ardly any meanin' in these degenerate times. What ails them in these days with the Old Red Rag? Since this mill in South Hafrica scarlet seems knocked clean out o' fashion, and mustard colour's all the rage—shockin' hugly it looks, too, I thinks!

"I 'ad a flutter over a good country the other evenin', and lookin' down, saw a crack pack runnin' a fox 'ard and well. Some o' the top-sawyers that

kep' close to 'em was all right, and dressed like sportsmen and gentlemen—scarlet coat, silk 'at, best o' Bartley's and 'Ammond's on their understandings; but there was a lot more in black tail-coats and mustachers lookin' like music-'all waiters out on the spree, and a still bigger lot in rat-catchin' or ferretin' kit, khaki-breeks, puttie leggin's and brown boots; some in tall 'ats, some in pot 'ats, and some few in shootin'-caps. Do the mustard-coloured boys think they looks better than the pink 'uns, I wonder? I tells 'em the ladies don't think so, and no more don't I!

“Ask the M.F.H. 'ow he would like his field to be dressed, and I'll wager he says ‘Pass the mustard!’ Do you all owe nothing to the M.F.H., and is it so uncommon easy to find another when he resigns? Ought you not to try and keep him, and please him by showin' him respect and dressin' yourselves like Henglish fox-'unters?

“The farmers,” continued Mr. Jorrocks, warming to his subject, and now wearing his wig a good deal awry,—“the farmers all loves the scarlet, so does all the willagers and labourers. See the school children when the 'unt comes by, 'ow they cheers the red coats and chaff the chaps in mufti! ‘The werry turnpike man,’ wrote a hauthor some years ago, ‘relaxes his grimness in favour of your Pink.’

“And should we not take the farmers into consideration in this matter? I thinks so, anyways, and they're all for the old colour to a man, and let's you know it!

“‘Hopen the gate, my man,’ sings out Scarlet Coat, in the deuce of a 'urry, and Bunchelod swings it

open, catches his shillin', and cries, 'Good luck to yer!'

"'Hopen the gate!' yells Mustard Breeks, and 'Odge jams 'is 'ands into 'is pockets, and says, 'Hopen it yourself, you blanky 'orsedealer!'

"'My wire's been cut,' says Giles Jolter, the day after the 'unt, 'and my man tells me it wasn't done by any of the 'Unt Gemmen, but by a hinferral chap rigged out like a gamekeeper. Blowed if I stand such goin's-on from the likes o' he,' and a row follows.

"What's the matter with the old Red Rag that ingenious youth should discard it?" said Mr. Jorrocks mournfully.

"'It's so 'ot and 'eavy,' says one. 'Rot!' says I; 'it's no 'eavier than a black Melton, and looks twice as well.'

"At 'Andley Cross," continued Mr. J., "I said in one of my Lectors—'For my part I likes a good roomy red rag that one can jump in and out with ease; good long-backed coats, the back to come down in a flap, plenty of good, well-lined flaps to wrap round the thighs,' and nowadays I see warm coats made of waterproof scarlet serge or tweed that are werry light and cost 'arf nothin'.

"In olden days there were not many tailors even in London that could make a 'untin' coat right or cut a pair o' breeches properly. Poole for coats; Bartley for boots; 'Anderson, 'Ammond, or Tautz for breeches—that was about the lot. Now there are a score of men within 'ail of Bond Street, and every one of them can make as good 'untin' togs as the other, so there is no difficulty about fittin' out the sportsman.

"No, it's the fashion that 'as done it!" said my visitor sadly. "The King don't 'unt now, more's the pity, though no one looked better than he did in his bit o' pink when Charles Payne 'unted the Pytchley; but the Royalties seem more on for shootin' than 'untin' now. 'Owever, though fashion keeps the red coat out of the field, it flourishes in the ball-room, where ingenious youth, though he dresses like a rat-catcher out 'untin', now swaggers about in scarlet with facings of warios colours to catch the heyas o' the gals, who are supposed to be unable to resist the red. But I blames the gals, too, mind you! Not 'cos they don't turn out properly, for they're just the ones that does. 'Ow smart they do look! What neat 'abits, what shinin', braided 'air coiled away beneath a glossy silk 'at or saucy bowler! See the carefully folded, snow-white ties with their pretty pins, and twig a fairish glimpse of a 'ighly polished boot showin' under the skirt! 'Ow smart and 'ow workmanlike! Wot a contrast to 'arf the men! But I blames 'em, 'cos if they liked they could quickly make the lads clap on the glorious old red coats they all admires.

"But I tell you what, my friend," said Mr. Jorrocks, bending forward earnestly, "if you comes in time to 'unt with us (as I 'opes you will), you'll see no khakis in the Helysian fields! Some black coats no doubt are wisible, for we have plenty o' parsons comin' out—Harchbishops (Harchangels, I means), Jack Russell, Froude, Kingsley, and cetera. And of course, the Duke's men sticks to the blue and buff—nothing will change them from that. But scarlet's the rule, and no one complains of the 'eat."

"See anything of Benjamin these times?" I interrupted.

"Benjamin don't complain of the cold where he is," said his old master drily; "and no one need tell 'im to think of ginger now! I guess he don't get much 'untin'—not fox-'untin', at least; a fine buoy in his way, no doubt, but I never could cram any knowledge of the chase into his noddle, nor any love for it into 'is 'eart, 'ard though I tried!

"Drat 'im!" continued Mr. Jorrocks testily, "wot between 'im and old Doleful and that 'umbug Mello 'Andley Cross wasn't altogether just a bed of roses. 'Owsomever, I ain't bothered by any of 'em now, but if Miserrimus was to come out with us, dashed if I wouldn't fly over him even if he wore the scarlet!"

And with that he smote the table such a bang that the glasses jingled again, and I started to my feet.

I rubbed my eyes; the chair opposite me was again vacant; the chiming clock on the mantelpiece was noisily striking midnight, but the aroma of lemon, sugar, boiling water, and (I think) whisky was still strong in the room.

"Could I have dreamt it all?" I sleepily muttered, and, extinguishing the lamp, walked slowly up to bed; but there was a soft tinkle of rain against the big staircase window as I passed, and a southerly wind seemed to carry from the far distance the faint, weird scream of a peacock.

The Journal of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

Volume 10, No. 1, 1963
1963

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